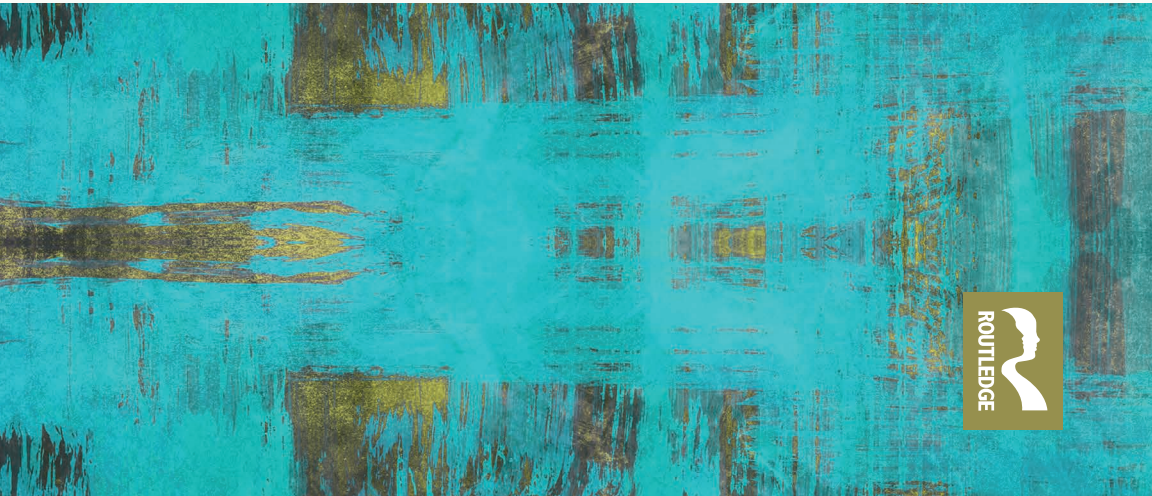
Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education

READING PLATO'S DIALOGUES TO ENHANCE LEARNING AND INQUIRY

EXPLORING SOCRATES' USE OF PROTREPTIC FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Mason Marshall



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Exploring Socrates' Use of Protreptic for Student Engagement

Mason Marshall

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Reading Plato's Dialogues to Enhance Learning and Inquiry

This scholarly volume proposes protreptic as a radically new way of reading Plato's dialogues leading to enhanced student engagement in learning and inquiry.

Through analysis of Platonic dialogues including *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Meno*, and *Republic*, the text highlights Socrates' ways of fostering and encouraging self-examination and conscionable reflection. By focusing his work on Socrates' use of protreptic, Marshall proposes a practical approach to reading Plato, illustrating how his writings can be used to enhance intrinsic motivation amongst students, and help them develop the thinking skills required for democratic and civic engagement.

This engaging volume will be of interest to doctoral students, researchers, and scholars concerned with Plato's dialogues, the philosophy of education, and ancient philosophy more broadly, as well as postgraduate students interested in moral and values education research.

Mason Marshall is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Pepperdine University, US.

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Introduction

In this book, I propose a radically new way of studying Plato. I explain what it is and what it has to offer. Nowadays most of Plato's readers examine the arguments in his dialogues, try to find the meaning of the drama in them, or both. Herein I develop an alternative, something else worth doing in addition, either as philosophers of education, as Plato scholars, as teachers who introduce Plato to students, or as students who encounter him for the first time.

The point of this new project would be to understand protreptic, as I will call it, borrowing a term based on an ancient Greek word (προτρέπειν). One literal meaning of that word is "turning or converting (someone) to a specific end,"[1] and in antiquity protreptic was, most broadly, just the effort to change a person's behavior, or the act of changing it. But there was such a thing as philosophical protreptic—converting someone or trying to convert them to a philosophical way of life—and this is the sort of protreptic that inspires my use of the term. I will use the term 'protreptic' to refer to the attempt to lead someone to inquiry of a certain sort, meaning, first and foremost, the attempt to bring about a fundamental change of heart so that they want truth more than anything else, they seek it through reasoned exchanges with other people, and they are honest enough to follow wherever the evidence leads.

Today, by and large, people mention protreptic just in discussing ancient Greece and Rome, but protreptic is no less important now than it was in antiquity. Among other reasons, it has a pivotal role to play even in the most basic classroom pedagogy. One of the critical issues in schools across the world is the need for students to want to learn: students who are motivated to learn for extrinsic reasons typically do not learn as much or as deeply as those who are motivated to learn for intrinsic reasons.[2] And there is a need for protreptic not just in schools but in all educational endeavors. This even is signally implied by a number of widespread views—for one, the idea associated with John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and a range of contemporary political theorists, among others, that democracy is in crisis when citizens are poor thinkers.[3] Serious thought also is vital not just for democratic citizens but, more basically,

for human beings, at the least because of its capacity to produce wonder, elevate the mind, and free us from dogmatism and prejudice. Even when it does not yield knowledge, it can help us find our way to the most sensible and responsible decisions we can make. And the world needs people who make decisions well. We need parents, spouses, attorneys, social workers, physicians, and so forth who can analyze a problem in ways that are trenchant and informed and are attuned to what is good and right. A corollary of this is that we need genuine debate on central issues about how to live—debate that is genuine insofar as it is gracious, upbeat, and productive both in spite of and by virtue of being candid and vigorous, because the people who take part in it aim at finding the truth even at the price of losing face or losing political ground. The idea of such debate and the idea of protreptic are as relevant as ever, though both, perhaps, are legacies of ancient Greece.

Philosophers and others who took up the project I propose would study Plato's Socrates in order to learn something about protreptic. They would ask what strategies he employs in his conversations with other people (for example, ways he may play on other people's emotions); they would assess which strategies are the best strategies one *could* employ in the circumstances he is in; and if there are better strategies than Socrates', they would rely on Plato in analyzing what they are. In the process, they would simply suppose certain things, such as the following:

- Socrates tries to improve other people. For example, he doesn't just want to win debates or make other people "look small," as a critic of his once put it.[4]
- Socrates is, at most, only minimally interested in changing other people's views. If he tries to persuade other people of certain beliefs, it is not because he thinks these beliefs are true (though he may think they are) but only because, as he sees it, they make us more likely to philosophize—for example, he thinks that believing there are Forms gives us hope that there is knowledge to be attained (cf. *Parmenides* 135b–c), and believing the theory of recollection assures us that knowledge is attainable (cf. *Meno* 86b–c).
- Socrates' aim in interacting with other people is nothing more and nothing less than to lead them to inquiry of the most basic sort, something we can call self-examination. To engage in it is to try to determine how to live well, and it is to ask not only how to reach your ends but also what the best ends are. It is also to want the truth most of all—that is, to want it even if it might turn out to be different from what you prefer—and to form certain traits of character accordingly, or at least to have them to some degree. To have the first of these traits, which we can call *conscientiousness*, is to take care to focus on the strength of the evidence in front of you rather than, say, being blinded by seductive imagery. To have the second trait, which

> we might say is to be *judicious*, is to be at pains to evaluate evidence correctly. To have the third trait is to be *responsive* to evidence in the sense that, if you find some that conflicts with what you believe, your beliefs can change. To have the fourth trait, *thoroughness*, is to seek out all the salient evidence that is relevant to the issue before you, at least when your stance on that issue does a lot to affect how you live. Part of being thorough is debating with other people in case they can offer evidence you have not yet seen. Thoroughness also involves reflecting on classic philosophical questions such as what justice and goodness are and whether there is a Platonic Form of the Good, since the answers to those questions affect the answers to others, including even everyday questions about how to live.

These suppositions might be false. For example, rather than simply leading people to examine themselves, Socrates may want to turn them into Platonists, at least in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. But one would ignore this in carrying out the project I will describe. Though it would draw heavily from Plato, the goal of it, ultimately, would be not to get Plato right but to gain insight into protreptic. More specifically, the end goal would be a fully developed theory of protreptic—a theory about how to engage in protreptic in the most effective conscionable ways—and one would aim for the theory that had the broadest applicability. A theory about converting people to Platonism, for example, would be less widely useful than a theory about fostering the sort of inquiry I just described (a Platonist theory might help Platonists, but would be of limited value for everyone else), and one would shape one's suppositions to have the result that fits one's purpose. In the same vein, when I mention protreptic in this book, I will mean strictly the attempt to foster self-examination, and I will think of self-examination in the way pictured just now. In doing so, I will bend certain terms, perhaps, but simply for ease of expression.

In studying Socratic protreptic, one would take two approaches to Plato's dialogues. I explain the first approach and the rationale for it in Chapter 1, and I explain the second approach and the rationale for it in Chapter 2. The first approach is the more significant of the two and is more different from conventional approaches to Plato, though it parallels them in at least one respect: just as certain scholars have used Plato's dialogues as tools with which to make progress in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics,[5] this approach uses the narratives in the dialogues, roughly, as thought experiments with which to gain insight into protreptic.

Both approaches, I hope, will be of interest to anyone who reads Plato. Scholars, for example, could incorporate them into Plato studies,[6] and philosophers who teach Plato could present features of them to students. A natural question, though, is whether doing so would be legitimate,

since it can seem that approaching Plato my way would amount to co-opting him rather than genuinely discussing him. So in Chapter 3, I argue that, in fact, it would amount to the latter. In Chapter 4, I respond to another concern that Plato scholars will likely have—namely, that my way of studying Plato would not be valuable enough compared to other projects in Plato studies. Finally, in Chapter 5 I carry out my two approaches in order to show that they can be productive.

Since a theory of protreptic would be about how to engage in protreptic in the most effective conscionable ways, it would involve two kinds of questions: questions about which protreptic strategies are most likely to be effective and questions about which are morally permissible. There are important questions to raise about moral permissibility, such as when, if ever, and in what ways, if any, it is okay to treat people as means in the course of protrepticizing them. But my emphasis in this book is on questions about effectiveness rather than normative questions, for a couple of reasons. First, although normative questions in general can be difficult to answer, it is obvious enough what kind of reflection is required in order to answer them. It is harder to see how to address questions about effectiveness, since they are empirical questions; at least, it can seem unlikely that studying Plato could help. Second, it turns out that, where protreptic is concerned, Plato does have a contribution to make and, in fact, could help with empirical questions even more than with normative questions. The first two chapters indicate why.

Though those two chapters are just about studying *Socrates'* strategies, I suppose one might also consider Parmenides' in Plato's *Parmenides*, the unnamed visitor's in Plato's *Sophist* and *Statesman*, and Timaeus' in Plato's *Timaeus*, supposing those three figures might engage in protreptic. It is partly for the sake of simplicity that I focus on Socrates.[7] In addition, one can explore how Plato protrepticizes his readers, rather than the ways Socrates protrepticizes his fictive interlocutors. Herein I concentrate on the latter because discussing both would be too much, and I imagine that nowadays there is more to gain from trying to improve on Socrates' protreptic than from asking how we could adjust Plato's dialogues to make them more effective. On the one hand, where a certain audience is concerned, it is hard to see how to improve on Plato's dialogues as written protreptic: they are remarkably successful with people who have the patience to read them. On the other hand, there may be few people in the internet age who do have the patience for works like Plato's, works of some length that are substantive and nuanced. Most people want to read something easily digestible and as streamlined as, say, a typical blog post. It may be that no piece of writing will do enough to move them: one may have to appeal to them in person, perhaps even in a confrontational way, in order to have much influence on them. If any piece of writing will be effective in their case, it will probably be a sort that is quite different from Plato's dialogues, different enough that, if we

want to design protreptic writings, we might as well start from scratch instead of working from the model that Plato provides.

Admittedly, perhaps even spoken protreptic will fail to move the average person; maybe it is futile to try to lead them to any sort of inquiry. On a common reading, Plato himself believes it is; in dialogues such as the *Republic*, at least, he thinks many people are impervious to argument since their beliefs were instilled in childhood or are reinforced by appetite.[8] My own view is that we ought to resist that sort of pessimism if possible: we might as well hold out hope for people until it is clear we should do otherwise, since there is no chance of making them more thoughtful unless we try. But one need not agree in order to value protreptic. Even if *most* people are not worth protrepticizing, there probably still are some who are.

This book is mainly for readers who have an interest in Plato, including Plato scholars and a range of philosophers who discuss education. But the notion of protreptic may appeal to other philosophers, too. Many are concerned about the current political climate in the United States and how less than thoughtful a number of citizens here can seem, whichever side of the issues they are on. Plus, most philosophers realize that the way they will influence the widest range of people is by working with students, and accordingly, many philosophers care deeply about fostering self-examination in them. I have shaped my discussion with this in mind. Mostly, all one needs in order to follow it is the barest acquaintance with Plato. A couple parts of Chapters 2 and 3 require a bit more (and I tell readers ahead of time which parts those are), but even there nonspecialists can see the basic idea and find it useful. As much as I can, I avoid scholarly disputes or address them only in notes. I do not interact much with the scholarly literature on protreptic, for example, since it has to do with how protreptic was practiced or viewed in antiquity, and my focus herein is less what protreptic was than what it might become. In the first two chapters, in particular, I also just skim the surface of Plato. Since my target audience includes Plato scholars, I sometimes pause to address concerns about how my claims square with particular parts of Plato's writings or recent scholarly discussion of them, but I go only as deep as necessary, and I need not go very deep. Motivating this book are practical concerns as much as interpretive issues about Plato. These concerns are practical, in part for the reasons I am about to name.

Notes

1. I borrow Collins' (2015, 1) apt wording. In Plato's dialogues, the verb προτρέπειν is used in various ways—e.g., at *Phaedo* 89a6 and *Protagoras* 348c3 it refers generically to impelling or urging—and there is an explicit reference to προτροπὴ ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ("conversion to philosophy") only in the *Euthydemus* (307a2). In this book, all references to Plato's works are to the text in Burnet's edition, except for references to the *Republic*,

which are to the text in Slings' edition. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Republic* are based on the ones in Bloom 1968, and all translations of Plato's other works are based on the translations in Cooper 1997. Unless otherwise noted, whenever I mention Socrates I refer to the figure who appears in Plato's dialogues (or to one of the figures there named Socrates; there may be more than one, for reasons I will explain).

2. See Froiland and Worrell 2016; Taylor et al. 2014; Froiland et al. 2012; Broussard and Garrison 2004; Linnenbrink and Pintrich 2002. On why it is so vital for students to want to learn, see esp. Nussbaum 2011, 152–57; 2002; 1998.
3. Examples include Shiffrin (2014), who even takes clear and better thinking to be the point of the First Amendment in the United States, and Talisse (2009), whom I draw from in the first chapter below. Also notable are Nussbaum (2010) and Sunstein (1995).
4. Thomas Babington Macaulay, quoted in Trevelyan 1875, 306.
5. See note 5 and the text to it in ch. 3 below.
6. Or Socratic studies, if it is separate from Plato studies. For simplicity, I will assume it is a species of it.
7. There are other reasons, too, though. For one, I doubt that any other character in Plato's dialogues has the sort of variability I describe in §1.3.2 below.
8. See esp. Scott 1999.

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1 A Top-Down Approach: Refining Protreptic Through Platonic Thought Experiments

The study of Socratic protreptic would answer a real-life need. In this chapter, I will begin by briefly explaining why, and then I will describe the main way in which Plato's readers could address this need. I will illustrate one approach they could take to Plato's dialogues, and I will discuss the rationale for it.

1.1 The Need for Protreptic

Protreptic, at first, might seem of interest only for those who study antiquity. Associated with the term 'protreptic', in its standard sense, is a set of ancient practices which are far removed from much of modern life. Oversimplifying only somewhat, we can characterize many of them in the following way. As philosophy developed in ancient Greece and Rome, philosophers worked hard to win converts to it. They often made their appeal in personal conversations, including conversations that were modeled on the ones that the fictive Socrates has in Plato's dialogues.[1] And they wrote texts that protrepticized their readers, that described or depicted spoken protreptic, or that offered advice on how to carry it out.[2]

Ancient philosophical protreptic varied in a number of respects, making it hard to define.[3] For example, different versions of it promoted different sorts of philosophy; and whereas some targeted only the uninitiated, so to speak, meaning people who had not yet taken up philosophy, others were aimed both at them and at people who already had, as if to keep them invested in it.[4] Different versions also used different means of persuasion. Though, in exhorting people, philosophers in antiquity typically provided arguments, some, perhaps, tried to persuade by non-rational means, just as Plato's Socrates may. On many views, he deliberately uses fallacious arguments at times, and he has a range of non-rational strategies for affecting other people's emotions, strategies that are even like a psychotherapist's.[5] Arguably, he aims less to *demonstrate* the importance of philosophy than just to convict people of its importance, whatever it takes. Some interpreters have thought that the same is true of Plato, though others have demurred.[6]

Despite the variation, though, certain features of ancient philosophical protreptic were common to all instances of it. Most notably, all of it was driven by passionate concern, and the change it tried to bring about is radical. Philosophers who engaged in it meant to lead people to "an entire lifestyle," in one scholar's phrase,[7] and in promoting serious thought they aimed for nothing less than full-scale conversion to it, not unlike modern religious conversion. Another scholar even spoke once of an "evangelical fervour" among ancient philosophers and their effort "to save souls."[8]

That, especially, can seem quaint and can make talk of protreptic today sound odd and antiquated. But it shouldn't sound that way. Here are some reasons, borrowed especially from what certain political philosophers and argumentation theorists have said recently.[9]

Let me start with a couple of points I mentioned before. One of the critical issues that schools face in democracies, as elsewhere, is the need for students to want to learn. And not just students in schools, but everyone in a democracy needs the drive to think seriously. After all, the less well we think, the more likely we are to end up with false beliefs. Plus, the less thoughtful and discerning the people around us are, the more likely we are to be misled. Human beings are dependent on one another for more than just food and clothing: we also rely on one another epistemically, meaning that most of our beliefs come from what other people have told us. Further, we affect one another especially when we live in a democracy. In a democracy, we have considerable influence not only as voters and jury members but also in our everyday conversations. So we need the people around us to be dependable. When we live our lives on the basis of false beliefs, things can turn out poorly, both for us and, at least as often, for others whom we affect: ignorance may be bliss sometimes, but it tends to fall out on other people. Supposing, then, that our beliefs help to shape our actions, our beliefs matter, and it matters how diligent of a thinker everyone is. There is even something reckless and neglectful about being unreflective.

This is the case, in fact, even if our beliefs have no effect on our actions at all.[10] The reason is that anyone who holds beliefs is thereby committed to thinking seriously, so that to fail to do so is to fall short of a goal that everyone inevitably has. To see why, consider an analogy.

All ordinary human beings, even before we have studied formal theories of human psychology, have an informal theory of it (what philosophers of mind call folk psychology) which includes principles as basic as these:

- People who get injured generally feel pain.
- People who are in pain often get angry.
- People who are angry are generally impatient.[11]

We might refine our informal theory once we have studied formal psychological theories, but the informal theory is so basic that, even then, it stays largely the same.

And like our informal theory of psychology, we all have an informal theory about epistemology, a theory so basic that it remains mostly intact even if we rework it once we study philosophy. This folk epistemology consists of the following principles:

- To hold a belief is to believe *something*. In other words, every belief has content.
- To believe something is to think it is true.
- To think it is true is generally to take oneself to have adequate reasons for this belief (or, as philosophers would say, reasons that warrant the belief).

Note, incidentally, that the third of these three principles allows that some people have bad reasons for their beliefs and even that some people have no reasons at all.[12] The principle says just that, when we believe, we generally *take* ourselves to have adequate reasons, where a reason is simply whatever seems to the believer to indicate that the belief is true.

Insofar as we accept these three principles, we have certain standards for how we form our beliefs. First, we think it is important to be *conscientious* in the sense of attending to the quality of the evidence in front of us, so as not to be blinded by seductive imagery, for example. Second, we believe we should be *thorough* in the sense of seeking out all the salient evidence that is relevant to an issue, at least when our stance on the issue does a lot to affect how we live. Third, we believe we need not only to gather the relevant evidence but also to make levelheaded inferences in assessing it; so we think we need to be *judicious*. And fourth, we believe we need to be *responsive* to evidence in the sense that the outcome of our deliberation can affect what we believe. These standards are, as it were, part of our measure of cognitive health, and we even think a nation should be run in accordance with them. Hence, for example, we expect ourselves to have good reasons for our views and to reconsider or revise them when we find problems with them; we expect our political leaders to act the same way; and they often try to convince us that they have.

Of course, this idea can seem naïve at first; it can look as if few people are so ambitious. Many, it seems, are intellectually lazy and simply deceive themselves when they come across counterevidence. And although politicians and pundits often take the *posture* of intellectual virtue (saying, for example, that they give us "straight talk" and "no spin zones" and avoid "bias" and "slant"), most or all their talk is probably just for appearance.

The fact remains, though, that political figures have to create this appearance in order to be compelling—they would be ineffective if they admitted that they just want to score rhetorical points—and this suggests that we hold them to the standards I have named. There is something similar to say about cases where we deceive ourselves into maintaining a belief in the face of overwhelming counterevidence: that we *have* to deceive ourselves is testament to the fact that we hold ourselves to the same standards to which we hold politicians. And notably, no one ever describes *themselves* as someone who maintains a belief through self-deceit, at least not while they still maintain the belief. All of this is hard to explain unless, at base, we think it is important to meet the standards of conscientious, thoroughness, judiciousness, and responsiveness.

Nonetheless, we do often fall short of these standards, the very standards to which we hold ourselves. Our prejudices get the better of us, we give in to intellectual laziness, we indulge it in other people, and so forth. If we are to live up to our own ideals, we need to want the truth enough that our habits, tendencies, and practices change, and we fully engage in self-examination. In part, this involves having earnest conversations with people who disagree with us and confronting classic philosophical questions such as what justice and goodness are and whether there is a God or a Platonic Form of the Good. Thoroughness requires that we address those questions, since the answers to them affect the answers even to everyday questions about how to live. And thoroughness requires us to seek out interlocutors whose views are different from ours, in case they can offer evidence we have not yet considered.[13]

Talk about protreptic can sound grandiose at first, particularly in a book involving Plato's Socrates. Socrates is a mythic figure; he seems bigger than life. But my point is a practical one. Especially in a democracy, people need to think seriously. In turn, the need for protreptic is real. Anyone who helped to meet this need would make a valuable contribution.

1.2 Working from the Top Down

How could someone contribute in that way? What they would need to do is help us identify the most promising conscionable strategies of protreptic, in my sense of the term. In other words, they would need to help us answer the following question: Of the strategies that are morally permissible, which are most likely to be effective?

There are a couple of obvious ways in which Plato's readers might do this. In examining how his Socrates interacts with other people, they might discover good protreptic strategies that could be borrowed and put to use here and now. They might also uncover case studies that would be valuable for ethicists. Most likely, it should be left to ethicists to determine which protreptic strategies are morally permissible, since

ethicists are best equipped to address that issue. Nonetheless, Plato scholars and other students of Plato might have something to add. A common thought is that ethicists need case studies drawn from narratives,[14] and Plato's dialogues would be a good source of them. Though Socrates' cause is evidently noble, some of his tactics can seem illicit. (On at least one reading, he even sexually teases people strategically.)[15] One can raise constructive questions about whether these tactics are justified.

But I think there are other, more significant ways in which reading Plato could help. In the rest of this chapter, I will begin to explain why. First, I will describe an approach that one could take in studying Socratic protreptic (§1.2), and then I will discuss what the point would be of engaging Plato this way (§1.3).

This approach would be guided by certain suppositions I have mentioned:

- Socrates tries to improve other people.
- He is, at most, only minimally interested in changing their views. If he tries to persuade other people of certain beliefs, it is not because he thinks they are true (though he may think they are) but only because, as he sees it, they make us more likely to philosophize.
- His aim in interacting with other people is nothing more and nothing less than to lead them to self-examination. In part, he simply wants to make them more conscientious, thorough, judicious, and responsive.

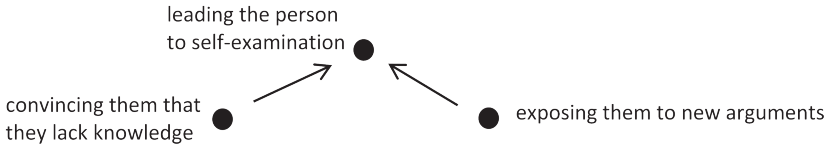
And there is another supposition that I will spell out toward the end of this chapter.

In illustrating the approach that I will describe, I will focus on Plato's *Euthyphro*. Admittedly, it is an open question whether protrepticizing someone like Euthyphro is even worthwhile, as I indicated in the Introduction above. But the answer might turn out to be "yes"; and regardless, the *Euthyphro* is useful for illustration because of how simple it is compared to many of Plato's other dialogues. I imagine it will also be familiar to many readers already. (For that reason, incidentally, I will not start by summarizing it below.) What I say about the *Euthyphro* will barely scratch the surface; I do not mean for it to be illuminating in itself. My goal is just to outline one way of studying Socratic protreptic, so that I then can explain some of the benefits this sort of work would have.

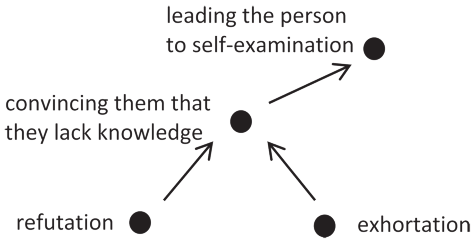
1.2.1 *Evaluating a Strategy*

If we are trying to lead a person to self-examination, we will always have at least one means to that end. One of our means, for example, might

be to expose the person to arguments they have not seen before. And we might also want to convince them that they lack knowledge. Let me represent the relation between means and ends this way:



If one of our goals is convincing the person that they lack knowledge, we will have means to that end, too. For example, if they claim to have knowledge, we might try to refute that claim, while also exhorting them to think they lack knowledge:

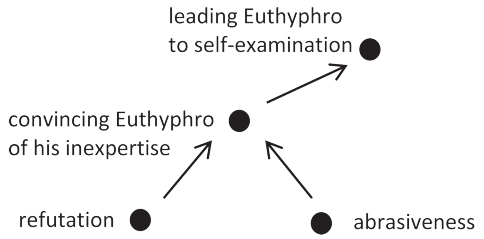


Socrates, too, will have means and ends that can be represented in the same way, with subsidiary means at the bottom of the schema and his final end at the top.

One way to study Socratic protreptic would be to work from the bottom of the schema up. In taking this approach, you would focus closely on particular passages in the Platonic dialogues, examining in detail how Socrates behaves at specific points in his conversations with other people, and you would ask why he behaves this way. You would suppose that his ultimate goal is protreptic, but you would try to figure out what his intermediate goals are, so to speak. I will illustrate that sort of approach in the next chapter.

Here let me describe a different approach, one that would work not from the bottom up, but from the top down. In taking this approach, you would imagine various strategies that Socrates might have, and you would evaluate them—not to see whether they are Socrates' strategies, but to gauge how promising they are. Here is an example.

Suppose you decided to evaluate a strategy like this one:



In this setup, Socrates' means of leading Euthyphro to self-examination is convincing him that he is not an expert, and Socrates has two means of convincing him: refutation and abrasiveness. It would make sense to imagine that abrasiveness is part of Socrates' strategy somehow, since he can seem to be rather hard on Euthyphro. As Euthyphro falls on his face over and over in the conversation, Socrates keeps suggesting, with evident irony, that he believes Euthyphro has wisdom and that he reveres Euthyphro for it, and at times Socrates' irony can seem rather cutting and thinly veiled.[16]

To evaluate the strategy I just pictured, you would start with the following question: Is trying to convince Euthyphro of his inexpertise the most promising way to protrepticize him? In other words, is it really the right tactic? Here are some points you might consider.

One downside of approaching Euthyphro this way is that it requires Socrates to take issue with him on topics that are sensitive at the least. Socrates has to contest not just Euthyphro's claims about piety, but his claim to have wisdom, a claim that is fundamental to who he says he is. For that matter, when Socrates starts talking with Euthyphro, Euthyphro is in the middle of prosecuting his own father in a culture in which it is unorthodox, at best, to do such a thing. His decision shames not only his father but Euthyphro, too, since Euthyphro lives in a society where a son's honor is tied to his father's honor. People think Euthyphro is crazy (μαίνεσθαι: 4a1) for taking his father to court, and Euthyphro's choice to do so is the occasion for his conversation with Socrates. (Socrates asks: "You have no fear of having acted impiously in bringing your father to trial?"; 4e7–8.) So if Socrates takes issue with Euthyphro, the conversation will inevitably be confrontational to some degree.

An obvious question is why Socrates has to be confrontational. Might he not get farther by using honey rather than vinegar? Oftentimes an effective way to influence someone is to become their friend and gain their trust and esteem. If they come to like you, you might rub off on them. If they admire you enough, they may even want to be like you.[17]

Socrates, of course, may have many reasons for taking a different tack. For one, if he is even inclined to befriend Euthyphro, he may doubt he will have the chance. His trial is approaching (2a–b), and he may expect the jury to convict him. At least, this is a fair guess, given how much he antagonizes the jury in Plato's *Apology*.

Regardless, there is reason to think that simply befriending Euthyphro is not the best way to protrepticize him. Euthyphro seems to want a friend less than an admirer. He says that, because of his great knowledge, he is "superior to the majority of men" (διαφέροι ... τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων: 5a1), and he evidently wants other people to agree that he is. He has set the terms of interacting with him so that either you take issue with him or you affirm his claim to be an expert, in which case you feed his sense of superiority and his assurance that he has no need to inquire.[18]

Admittedly, we can interpret Euthyphro differently from this. It may be significant that he seems bothered by the fact that other people laugh at him. (He seems bothered enough that Socrates is compelled to say: "My dear Euthyphro, to be laughed at does not matter perhaps ..."; 3c6–7.) Consider a fuller version of a passage I have already quoted:

> [SOCRATES:] You think that your knowledge of the divine, and of piety and impiety, is so accurate that ... you have no fear of having acted impiously in bringing your father to trial?
>
> [EUTHYPHRO:] I should be of no use [ὄφελος], Socrates, and Euthyphro would not be superior to the majority of men, if I did not have accurate knowledge of all such things. (4e9–5a2)

Borrowing from modern-day pop psychology, we could say that maybe the reason Euthyphro insists he is superior is that, deep down, he fears he is worthless: other Athenians have put off on him, and he needs to assure himself of his value. If this is indeed Euthyphro's main motivation, then perhaps Socrates misses an opportunity in the rest of the passage quoted above. What Socrates does, in responding to Euthyphro, is challenge his claim to have knowledge about piety. But if Euthyphro's problem, at root, is that he feels inadequate, then maybe it would be more effective for Socrates to challenge a different claim that Euthyphro makes—namely, the claim that either Euthyphro is an expert or he is "of no use."[19] If Euthyphro came to think that he could still have worth even without being an expert, maybe he would feel less need to be one, and then he might be easier to protrepticize.

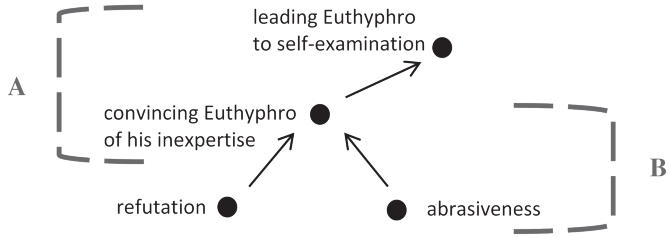
It would be unpromising, though, for Socrates to take this route. Imagine he succeeded and Euthyphro was persuaded to think: "Maybe I could still have worth even if I didn't have expertise." Even then, Euthyphro still might believe he is an expert and, in turn, that he is

superior to the majority of men. And in that case, the thought "I might still have worth" probably would not count for much. Few people, perhaps, would settle just for having worth when, instead, they could be superior.

For reasons like these, you might decide that trying to disabuse Euthyphro of his claim to expertise is a good way to protrepticize him. In fact, you might conclude that it is better than all the alternatives.

1.2.2 *The Limits of Common Sense*

From there, you would keep working from top to bottom in the schema I mentioned before.



Having decided that **A** is the right tactic, you would now ask whether **B** is.

Part of that question might be easy to answer. Presumably, of course, if Socrates is to convince Euthyphro that he is not an expert, Socrates needs to give him reason to think he is not. So the fact that Socrates tries to refute Euthyphro would make sense.

But what about Socrates' abrasiveness? Why run the risk of alienating Euthyphro if the point is to protrepticize him?

There certainly are reasons we can imagine. Consider how persistent Euthyphro has been. The fact that people jeer at him and deem him crazy has not dissuaded him from calling himself an expert.[20] Evidently, he believes he can *prove* his expertise—he thinks the problem is just that people will not listen to him:

> [SOCRATES:] You will obviously show [the jury] that [your father's] actions were unjust and that all the gods hate such actions.
> [EUTHYPHRO:] I will show it to them clearly, Socrates, *if only they will listen to me*.
> [SOCRATES:] They will listen if they think you show them well. (9b8–c1)

The trick is to get Euthyphro to see that, even if people listen, he cannot deliver—in other words, that there is no reason for anyone, including

him, to think he is an expert. And a danger is that, once he has been refuted, he will convince himself that he has not been—in other words, that he will say (as he does at 11c9–d2) that Socrates just plays clever tricks and somehow makes Euthyphro's *good* statements *look* bad. Perhaps the conversation needs to unsettle Euthyphro so much that he cannot rationalize it away; perhaps it has to break him.

Moreover, Socrates needs to keep Euthyphro from ending the conversation before he is fully refuted, and a good way to hold his interest might be to challenge his honor. It is one thing to withdraw from chitchat; it is another to back down from a fight. In a fight, Euthyphro's manhood would be at stake, and he might be less inclined to run away. This consideration and others can suggest that Socrates does well to be abrasive.[21]

But certain other considerations cut in the opposite direction. For one, although Socrates needs to keep Euthyphro in the conversation, there is a delicate balance to strike. The more Socrates escalates the confrontation, the more threatened Euthyphro may feel. Although framing the conversation as a fight might give Euthyphro incentive to stick around at first, it also might make him more likely to leave once it is clear that he cannot win. (Even if he fears only that Socrates will make him *look* bad, he still may care what people think of him.)

And consider the risk that Euthyphro will rationalize and deny the force of what Socrates says. Though Socrates' abrasiveness *might* help to guard against that danger, being abrasive might ultimately be less effective than being congenial, benign, and likable. Many times, when someone disagrees with you, it is hard to admit they are correct; and it tends to be especially difficult when you resent them. Admitting they are correct is often easier if you like them, and it is easier to like them if they seem to like *you* or to want the best for you. Aristotle may be right that the appearance of goodwill (εὔνοια) is part of what inspires confidence in people's character in a way that makes them more persuasive (*Rhetoric* 1378a6–8).

So it is difficult here to know what to say. What if Socrates approached Euthyphro in a slightly different way from what we see in the *Euthyphro*? What if Socrates offered the same refutative arguments, but was gentler and milder and never abrasive?[22] Would he then have a better chance of making headway with Euthyphro? Sooner or later, you would face questions as difficult as these in taking the approach I am describing. How would you address them?

1.2.3 *Imagining in Detail*

What you would do is imagine hypotheticals in detail. In this case, for example, you would imagine specific things that Socrates might say or do in being gentler and milder, and specific ways in which Euthyphro might react. You would ask how the conversation between them would

probably go, and in your imagination, you would play it out fully. Here are some examples.

In talking with Euthyphro, Socrates makes a number of provocative sidebar remarks,[23] and he also is rather abrupt in the way he presents his refutative arguments. For example, when Euthyphro claims that piety is what the gods love, Socrates replies: "Splendid, Euthyphro! You now have answered in the way I wanted" (7a2–3), and right away he sets to work, as if he is eager to tear Euthyphro down. The exchange takes, roughly, the following form:

[SOCRATES:] Your claim is that *p*, right?
[EUTHYPHRO:] Yes.
[SOCRATES:] You've also said that *q*?
[EUTHYPHRO:] Yes.
[SOCRATES:] And you'll agree that *r*?
[EUTHYPHRO:] Yes.
[SOCRATES:] And also that *s*?
[EUTHYPHRO:] Yes.
...
[SOCRATES:] But all those claims together entail *x*, don't they?
[EUTHYPHRO:] I'm afraid so.

Cross-examination in this style can seem unceremonious.

So you might experiment with alternative ways Socrates could present his arguments. He has a range of options. For example, when Euthyphro proposes that piety is what the gods love, Socrates might begin reassuringly, and in a tone of genuineness rather than irony:

> This account intrigues me, Euthyphro. I can sense that you have indeed thought a lot about the gods. I am puzzled, though. I wouldn't have expected you to say quite what you said just now. May I tell you what my confusion is?

Even gentler would be to take a confessional tone, as if the conversation will be about Socrates' shortcomings rather than Euthyphro's:

> I often struggle, though, with questions like these. I get bogged down and caught in difficulty. These questions probably are newer to me than they are to you. May I tell you what my difficulty is in this case, and will you help me find my way out of it? You may have encountered this sort of puzzle before.

If Euthyphro agreed to help, Socrates might then explain the problem all at once, instead of cross-examining Euthyphro:

> Thank you, my friend, for indulging me. Here is my quandary. You said a moment ago that *p*. It can seem also that *q*, *r*, and *s* ... . But

together all those claims entail *x*. Do you see my difficulty and, if so, a solution to it?

Of course, this method might be *too* gentle. If Socrates presented the problem this way, perhaps Euthyphro would dismiss it as unimportant ("I wouldn't worry about that difficulty, Socrates") or feel no need to respond to it ("I'll give it some thought sometime"). You might decide that, when Socrates mentions *p*, *q*, *r*, and *s*, he needs Euthyphro to assent to them so that Euthyphro has a stake in the conversation and will lose face if *p*, *q*, *r*, and *s* turn out to conflict with one another.

So you might consider a subtle way in which Socrates would elicit Euthyphro's assent. You might imagine that, again in a sincere tone, Socrates would talk as if he is unsure of himself and wants consolation:

[SOCRATES:] First, I am often of two minds. Though sometimes I doubt that *p*, at other times I am drawn to it. Perhaps you sympathize with me? You yourself claimed that *p* a moment ago. Does *p* still seem to you to be true?

[EUTHYPHRO:] It does.

[SOCRATES:] Second, I sometimes fancy that *q*. I have doubts about *q*, too, but on occasion I am prone to believe it. I'm curious: does this make me seem odd, Euthyphro, or do you yourself believe that *q*?

[EUTHYPHRO:] I have the same belief, Socrates.

1.2.4 *Probability*

Momentarily, I will explain why you would do all this. First, though, I should pause to make a distinction. In thinking of specific statements that Socrates might make and specific ways Euthyphro might reply, you would ask how the two of them are *most likely* to act. In other words, you would ask a question about probability. But your question would not be "What is probable *in the Euthyphro*?"[24] Let me explain what I mean.

In any work of fiction, some propositions are fictionally true. (For example, in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories it is fictionally true that there is a detective named Sherlock Holmes.) Some propositions that are fictionally true in a work of fiction are simply implied in it: they are true, implicitly, just because certain other propositions are true explicitly.[25] (For example, implied in Conan Doyle's stories, perhaps, is that the United Kingdom sought to expand its territories, because explicit in the story is that Watson was an army surgeon in India.) And just as there are implied fictional truths, there also are implied fictional probabilities. Take, for example, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In that novel, the character Jim runs great risk to escape slavery.

Accordingly, after he and Huck have rafted down the river for days and days, it is improbable in Twain's story that Jim all of a sudden would say: "Come to think of it, I'd rather be a slave. Let's go back."

How are truths and probabilities implied in a work of fiction? Philosophers have explored questions like this one.[26] One theory is that the fictional truth *p* implies the fictional truth *q* if *q* would have been an *actual* truth as long as *p* had been an actual truth. Roughly, this means that everything that is true in the real world is true in a fiction except for the parts of the fiction that are explicitly different from the real world. For example, the Death Star in *Star Wars* is supposed to behave the way large hunks of metal behave in the real world, except insofar as the Death Star is explicitly different from them. And Jim and Huck are supposed to behave as real human beings behaved in the 19th-century United States, except inasmuch as they are explicitly different from them.

An objection to this theory is that it makes fictions generate too many implied truths. For example, the theory entails that, if it is true in the real world that there is water on Mars, then the same is fictionally true in Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*. One upshot is that not even the authors of fictions can know everything that is true in their stories. And this can seem farfetched.

So we might favor a different theory. We might say that whether *p* implies *q* in a fiction has to do not with whether *q would indeed* be true in the real world as long as *p* were true in the real world, but with whether, in the culture in which the fiction was written, *it was commonly believed* that this is how things would work, such that the author would have expected a reader to infer *q* from *p*. This alternative theory has its own problems.[27] But it still might be correct. And if it is, then what is true or probable in a work of fiction depends as much on the author and her culture as on how the world really is. To the extent that it does, and to the extent that Plato's dialogues are fictions,[28] the question "What is probable *in the Euthyphro*?" amounts to the question "How, most likely, could Plato have written the *Euthyphro* differently?" For an illustration, consider again the idea about self-esteem that I drew before from modern-day pop psychology. Even if it is true in the real world that people like Euthyphro just need to feel affirmed, it may not be true in the *Euthyphro* itself, given the way Plato and his contemporaries were prone to see people. And of course, what is untrue in the *Euthyphro* affects what is *improbable* therein. For example, if it is untrue in the *Euthyphro* that Euthyphro's problem is just low self-esteem, then it may also be improbable therein that Socrates would get farther with Euthyphro if he simply made him feel better about himself.

Again, though, in trying to gauge how Euthyphro would probably behave, you would not ask what is probable in the *Euthyphro* itself.

Instead, you would ask: "How would Euthyphro (the character in Plato's dialogue) probably behave *if he were a real person*?" (or, "How would he have behaved if he *had* been a real person in ancient Athens?").[29] There is a sense, then, in which you would treat the scenarios in Plato's dialogues as if they are thought experiments.[30] This point is fairly important, so let me elaborate, at the risk of overkill. Consider three examples of thought experiments in contemporary philosophy.

1.2.5 *Thought Experiments*

In one well-known thought experiment, John Searle imagines a man locked in a room where there are boxes containing Chinese symbols. People pose questions to the man by passing Chinese symbols into the room, and in response he sends them other Chinese symbols that convey the correct answers. But he does this only by following an instruction book that he has with him in the room: he does not understand Chinese. Searle concludes that neither can a digital computer understand Chinese, since a digital computer has nothing more than the man in the room has.[31]

In defending abortion, Judith Jarvis Thomson presents a scenario in which you are kidnapped, and your circulatory system is connected to the circulatory system of a famous violinist. You are told that the violinist will die unless he uses your kidneys for nine months (or for nine years, or longer still) and that you should not unplug yourself from him, because "violinists are persons" and "all persons have a right to life."[32] Would it indeed be wrong to unplug yourself? Thomson expects us to find the idea outrageous and to realize, accordingly, that something is wrong with a familiar argument against abortion—an argument that infers the wrongness of abortion from, in part, the thought that fetuses have a right to life.

Frank Jackson pictures another scenario in mounting an attack on physicalism, the view that "the actual world … is entirely physical."[33] Mary, the scientist he imagines, knows all physical facts about human beings and our environment, including what causes us to see the color red. But she herself has never seen it. Jackson says that, if one day she sees it for the first time and discovers what it is like to see red, she will learn something she had not known before. So, since she already knows all physical facts about human beings and our environment, Jackson concludes that there is something which is non-physical and, thus, that physicalism is false.

What I should stress is that, when we read the essays in which Searle, Thomson, and Jackson present these thought experiments, their intentions and cultural context matter only up to a point. They matter just to the extent that they bear on the meaning of what Searle, Thomson, and Jackson say, and that meaning matters just insofar as we need

to decipher the basic details of each scenario they describe.[34] At the outset, we need to be able to tell, for example, whether the man in the Chinese room has an instruction book, whether you were kidnapped before you were hooked to the violinist, and whether black and white are the only colors Mary has seen. But once we understand the setup, we judge for ourselves whether the man in the Chinese room is analogous to a computer, whether the violinist is entitled to the use of our kidneys, and whether Mary would learn something new. Our judgments at that point depend not on the authors or their cultures, but strictly on how *we* see the world.[35] When we consider Frank Jackson's scenario, for example, we ask simply a counterfactual question like the following:

> If there were a person who fit Jackson's description of Mary, and she saw the color red for the first time, would she thereby learn something new?

You could ask similarly counterfactual questions involving Plato's dialogues—for example, questions such as this one, which has to do with whether the *Euthyphro* is true to life:

> If there were two people talking with each other near the king-archon's court (which is where the conversation in the *Euthyphro* takes place), and they behaved the way Socrates and Euthyphro behave in the *Euthyphro*, would one of them end the conversation the way Euthyphro does at the close of the *Euthyphro*?

You also could ask counterfactual questions like the following:

> If there were two people talking with each other near the king-archon's court, and they behaved the way Socrates and Euthyphro behave in the *Euthyphro*, except that the one person was gentler and milder, would he be more likely to make headway with the other person in protrepticizing him?

In addressing questions like these involving the *Euthyphro*, you need not know anything about who Plato thinks the characters Socrates and Euthyphro are. You could piece together who they are strictly by considering their behavior. You also could fill in other details about the scenario involving Socrates and Euthyphro (for example, details about the king-archon's court) simply from Socrates' and Euthyphro's behavior and by being familiar with ancient Athens. And then you could make your own judgment, independently of what you thought Plato believed.

You could treat many other Platonic dialogues in the same sort of way, including dialogues such as the *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* in which

Socrates talks with people who seem more prone to philosophize than people like Euthyphro are. Granted, some of Plato's dialogues contain more than just conversation. In dialogues such as the *Charmides*, *Lysis*, and *Republic*, Socrates even narrates as if he is addressing Plato's reader. But in drawing from the *Republic*, for example, you could simply ignore Socrates' narration: you could extract from his story the long conversation that he recounts, and then ask what protreptic strategies he might employ both with Thrasymachus and with more congenial interlocutors like Glaucon and Adeimantus.[36] One can imagine Socrates protrepticizing even the two of them.[37]

1.3 Purposes

Why engage in the sort of exercise I have described? What is to be gained from it? It would involve certain empirical questions, such as "How would someone like Euthyphro probably react?" Questions of that sort might seem better left to social scientists. What contribution could students of Plato make?

1.3.1 *Theorizing*

One point to consider is that social scientists have not studied protreptic before. To prepare to study it, they would have a long way to go. Of course, they have considered topics that might be relevantly similar to protreptic, topics such as therapy, persuasion and attitude change, and education. But while those other topics *might* be relevantly similar to protreptic, they also might be relevantly different. For example, what makes psychotherapy effective may be considerably different from what makes protreptic successful.[38] Similarly, the task of leading someone to a more examined life may differ in important respects from the sorts of rhetorical tasks that social scientists have investigated, such as persuading people to change their political votes, donate to charity, or buy a manufacturer's product.[39] And protreptic may be unlike conventional education in significant ways. More than conventional education, it aims to bring about change that is fundamental and profound.[40]

So if social scientists are to study protreptic at some point, one question to be answered is whether and, if so, how protreptic is different from topics they have already explored. For this and other reasons, there needs to be a *theory* of protreptic—a theory about how to protrepticize people—even if social scientists are to run controlled experiments. Controlled experiments always have to be guided by a theory.

How would one form a theory of protreptic, then? The way to do it would be, first, to imagine and analyze a wide range of protreptic scenarios—specific situations in which one person protrepticizes another person or a group of people—and to think through which protreptic

strategies are most promising in each case. Social scientists could do this work themselves, of course, but it need not fall to them alone: others, even in the humanities, might help.

In trying to pick out which strategies were most promising in a given scenario, the first step would be just to think as far as common sense could take us—for example, the way I described above in reflecting on the scenario involving the *Euthyphro*. When a question arose that was hard to answer—for example, the question "Would Socrates get farther by being gentle instead of abrasive?"—the way to make headway would be to tweak the scenario—for example, by imagining in detail what Socrates might say in being gentler and how Euthyphro would probably respond. This is the way anyone would elicit intuitions that were not yet ready to hand. It is easier to answer a question like "How would Euthyphro reply if Socrates said specifically [*X*]?" than to answer the broad, abstract question "What if Socrates were gentler?" More generally, we often have to imagine something in detail in order to gauge how likely it is. Suppose, for example, I tell you about a friend of mine, Hans, whom you have never met. You ask me what he is like, and in response I make a series of claims about him, such as the following five:

1 He is impulsive.
2 He is laidback.
3 He is very emotional, in the sense that he is ruled more by his heart than by his head.
4 He tends to grow emotionally dependent on other people.
5 He spends lots of time with his two dogs, and sometimes he seems to like them more than he likes other human beings.

Suppose you wonder whether Hans really exists or whether I am making him up; my description of him seems odd enough, say, that you wonder whether there even could be a person such as Hans. To test my credibility, you will probably need to try to envision, in narrative form, what the combination of a "laidback" demeanor and "emotional dependence" could be. In many cases, theorists would need to do something similar in thinking through protreptic scenarios.

Once it was clear enough which strategies seemed most promising in a particular scenario, the next step would be to figure out specifically why they seemed most promising—in other words, to pinpoint what it is about the people in this situation and the circumstances they are in that makes these strategies seem better than the alternatives. The way to address that question would be to tweak the scenario again, but in a different way from before. Imagine, for example, that you wanted to know what it is about Euthyphro that makes gentleness (or abrasiveness) better suited to him. What you could do is tweak his behavior, first one way and then another, so that, for example, in one version

of your scenario he did not get mad when he was refuted (as he does at 11b6–d2), in another version he did not brag about himself (as he does at 4e9–5a2, 5b–c, 6c), and so on. Then, after you had made your adjustments, you could try again to predict his behavior. Experimenting this way—that is, modifying your picture of him selectively—is how you would locate the traits of his that shape your judgment about how he can behave. This is similar to how experimenting with scenarios can help us tell what shapes our *moral* judgments. Suppose we are asked to imagine that a trolley is about to crash, killing everyone on board. The passengers will live if we pull a lever that switches the trolley to a different set of tracks, but the trolley then will crush a bystander, so the question is whether to pull the lever. Our answer to this question may change depending on which details we add to the scenario and which we omit from it—for example, whether we imagine that an important political leader is on board the trolley, that the bystander is an innocent child or, instead, a loud, obnoxious man, and so on. Tweaking the scenario, first one way and then another, can give us better insight into what affects the moral judgments we make about this case. It is for similar reasons that tweaking a protreptic scenario is how we would isolate the elements of it that account for our judgments about how it is likely to turn out.

Of course, we might not always be successful: sometimes we might be at a loss to tell what affected our judgment about a particular case, and sometimes we might have no judgment at all, or my judgments might conflict with yours. But if we did run into cases that gave us trouble, it would be helpful to discover them, so that we could identify the gaps in the initial theory we produced.[41] And regardless, experimenting with scenarios would be the way to form an initial theory, a theory that, to whatever extent possible, broke human beings into categories and predicted, regarding the people in a given category, which protreptic strategies are best suited to them in which circumstances. Developing a theory of that sort would be a vital prelude to controlled experiments.

And it might be worthwhile on its own, too. The question "What are the most promising strategies of protreptic?" might be as hard to answer with controlled studies as questions like "What are the most promising approaches to psychotherapy?" Wisely, perhaps, few psychotherapists rely on controlled studies exclusively. Yet they want more than a vague sense of which approaches to psychotherapy are most sensible, so they have ways of honing the intuitions they have gained from experience; for example, they enact a therapy session in their imaginations or through role-playing.[42] Similarly, people who value protreptic might need ways to hone their intuitions about it. Perhaps the best they could ever do in carrying out protreptic is rely on their judgment and hope to achieve something like prudence or

phronēsis. Even so, it is good to have ways to *tutor* one's judgment. And reflecting on scenarios and on other people's analyses of them is a way to do just that.

1.3.2 *Why Plato's Dialogues?*

Scenarios drawn from Plato's dialogues are ideal fodder for the sort of theorizing I just described. This is not to say that they are exceptionally or uniquely useful: there is no need for them to be. After all, theorizing about protreptic would have to make use of a wide range of scenarios; the wider the range, the better. So even if, say, Shakespeare's readers were already using Shakespeare to study protreptic, it is not as if using Plato to study it would just be duplicating the work in another field. Nonetheless, the Platonic dialogues would be particularly useful, for at least a couple of reasons.

One reason involves the fact that they are narratives. In analyzing scenarios together, theorists would have to be on the same page with one another about what the details of each scenario were, so they would need ways to communicate with one another. And quite likely, narrative is the only suitable vehicle for conveying scenarios involving protreptic. Scenarios like these should be as much like real life as possible; and in real life, there tend to be a great many factors that affect which protreptic strategies are most appropriate in one situation or another, and the relationships among those factors tend to be complicated. In John Searle's Chinese Room, for example, only a few factors are relevant, and Searle can state them quickly and directly (saying simply: "Imagine a native English speaker … who knows no Chinese locked in a room full of boxes of Chinese symbols …"—and so forth).[43] But hypothetical scenarios involving protreptic would have to be far more involved, involved enough that they would probably need to be drawn from well-developed stories.

Plato's stories are a natural source to turn to. Perhaps someday there will be new stories that are even more useful than his—for example, dialogues set in the modern age so that the characters in them are more like real people are nowadays.[44] But of course, we will not know until someone writes them. And of the stories that are already on offer, none is more useful than the stories in Plato's dialogues.[45] No doubt, other works of fiction may surpass the Platonic dialogues by literary standards; the characters in Plato's dialogues are less richly developed than the characters in Jane Austen's novels, for example. But Austen's characters rarely, if ever, engage in philosophical discussion explicitly.[46] If we want to imagine how a protreptic conversation with them might go, we have to rewrite Austen's stories almost from scratch. By contrast, Plato's dialogues already involve protreptic, or at least something fairly close to it.[47]

They have another advantage, too. They let us imagine a wide variety of ways in which Socrates could plausibly behave. Here is what I mean.

Whenever we imagine someone, either a real person or a fictional character, there are limits to what we can envision them doing. At least, there are limits to what we think is *plausible* to envision. How strict the limits are depends in part on how varied the person's behavior has been on the occasions when we have observed them, and it also depends on how much we have watched the person in action. For example, when you have known someone for a year and have never seen her crack a smile, it is hard to imagine her acting anything but staid and stolid, and part of the reason is how much uniformity you have seen in her behavior. But also important is that you have observed her for a full year. If after all that time you saw her laughing and joking one day, you would tend to say something like: "Joan was so funny this morning! I never dreamed she had it in her!" You would not be as surprised if you had just met her and had only twice seen her act so subdued.

As a general rule, then, the more variety we have seen in a person's behavior, the more we can imagine the person doing, yet the more we have observed the person, the more constricted our imagination may be, and the more variety we will need to have seen in their behavior in order for our imagination to be very flexible. The more we have observed the person acting the same, the harder it will be to imagine them doing something different.

But there are exceptions to this rule. Suppose, for example, that you believe Joan's behavior may all be staged—in other words, you think that, in acting staid and stolid, she perhaps is not just being herself or acting naturally, but may be calculating and methodical, carrying out a clever scheme (perhaps a noble scheme) designed to achieve some specific effect on other people. In that case, for all you know, she is capable of doing a lot besides what you have seen her do. She will be rather enigmatic, and there will not be much you can put past her.

In Plato's dialogues, it is a live possibility that Socrates is calculating, deliberate, and strategic in everything he does; so even if he often acts more or less the same, he is rather enigmatic. Of course, he is still a particular person (albeit a fictive character), and again, there always are at least *some* limits to what we can imagine a particular person doing. Yet the constraints in Socrates' case are especially loose. And this is ideal. In scenarios that we used to form an initial theory of protreptic, we would want the person doing protreptic to be as much of a wildcard as possible. The tighter the constraints were on what we could imagine the person doing, the more we might end up with a theory specific to them—a theory that said simply which strategies are best for *this* person to use in one case or another. A preferable theory would be more

broadly applicable and thus would identify the best strategies for anyone to use, anyone capable of using these strategies well.[48] Particular people then could adapt this theory to their needs in carrying out protreptic. (For example, if the theory said that strategy *X* is most promising and that strategy *Y* is second-best, a particular person could then decide: "Strategy *X* probably would not work in my case, so I should opt for strategy *Y*.") And this initial theory would lay the groundwork for a theory that was more exact.[49]

1.3.3 *Suppositions*

There is a caveat to one claim I just made. I said it is a live possibility that Socrates is calculating, deliberate, and strategic in everything he does. This is true under certain suppositions I have already mentioned, plus one supposition that I should now add. I explained that, in studying Socratic protreptic my way, one would suppose the following:

- Socrates tries to improve other people.
- He is, at most, only minimally interested in changing their views. If he tries to persuade other people of certain beliefs, it is not because he thinks they are true (though he may think they are) but only because, as he sees it, they make us more likely to philosophize.
- His aim in interacting with other people is nothing more and nothing less than to lead them to self-examination. In part, he simply wants to make them more conscientious, thorough, judicious, and responsive.

The one additional supposition would be that the character Socrates who appears in each dialogue is the same Socrates who appears in the other dialogues, meaning that each Socrates is numerically identical to the others and has the same aims, proclivities, and beliefs (if he has beliefs).

At least when we read Plato with these four suppositions, it does seem that Socrates perhaps orchestrates his behavior. Under the first three suppositions, he may not believe the claims he makes: he may simply want to provoke his interlocutors and draw them into conversation, for example. Moreover, when we add the fourth supposition that I named just now, the Socrates who merely questions in some dialogues is the same Socrates who presents complicated philosophical views in other dialogues, and who propounds different, perhaps even conflicting, views in still other dialogues. (For example, he defends hedonism in the *Protagoras* and rejects it in the *Gorgias*, among other places.)

So when you worked under these four suppositions and formed your image of Socrates from how he behaves in all the dialogues together,

your imagination would only expand. Whatever variety there is in his behavior would broaden your sense of what he is capable of doing, and the uniformity in his behavior would shrink your imagination only a little, if at all.[50]

I realize that some of these suppositions clash with ideas that have been common among Plato scholars. To name just one, the last supposition is at odds with a classic picture in which Plato first wrote a series of dialogues that merely depict the historical Socrates and then wrote other dialogues that convey Plato's own philosophical views, views which evolved and even changed while Plato was writing the later dialogues. We can fill in this picture in various ways, but one way is to say that the Socrates in certain later dialogues is distinct from the Socrates in the earlier dialogues and has different aims, proclivities, and beliefs.[51] Though interpretations such as that one may be less prominent in Plato studies than they once were, they have influenced generations of readers, so it might seem odd just to bracket them.

But to do so would not be to ignore their importance or the value of what Plato scholars have done. In fact, the work they already produce would be a vital resource for the program of study I propose. To be sure, most scholars in recent decades have focused on the arguments in Plato, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses, how they could be improved, and so forth. This, obviously, is different from picking out protreptic maneuvers and asking what *their* strengths and weaknesses are and how they could be improved. But questions about protreptic would often hinge on questions about the arguments in the dialogues. For example, in considering which strategies Socrates might employ, one would need to ask what he uses his arguments for, in which case one would need to assess how strong the arguments are, so as to decide, among other things, whether they are meant to provide a demonstration or, instead, just to provoke his interlocutors. For this and other reasons, the study of Socratic protreptic would work in concert with established ways of reading Plato. In that sense, at least, it is not quite as iconoclastic as it might seem at first.

1.4 Conclusion

It matters whether we engage in self-examination. Accordingly, it is important to make protreptic as effective as it can be. How to do so is an empirical question, of course, and perhaps only social scientists could answer it fully. But they first would need a theory to test, and to be testable, a theory would have to be well developed and refined. Forming a suitable theory requires surveying a wide range of relevant scenarios, figuring out what the most promising strategies of protreptic seem to be in these situations, and considering why they seem most promising. And

Plato's dialogues are ideal for this purpose. Analyzing the scenarios in them in the way described in this chapter would have real value.

Notes

1. See Long 2002, 54–57 on the extent to which Epictetus drew inspiration from Plato's Socrates.
2. Examples of ancient texts that protrepticize their readers include Aristotle's *Protrepticus* and Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*. Texts that depict spoken protreptic include Aeschines' *Alcibiades* and Antisthenes' *Protreptici*. Texts that describe spoken protreptic or offer advice on how to carry it out include Epictetus' *Discourses* and Philo of Larissa's remarks in Stobaeus' *Anthology*.
3. Alieva (2018, 35) says, in effect, that defining it is impossible, and Jordan (1986) is agnostic. Collins (2015, 17–18) and Slings (2004, 59–60) offer definitions. One issue is how, if at all, it differed from paraenesis (roughly, advice or counsel).
4. See Moore 2020, 290 and Alieva 2018, 37–38, which contains references.
5. On Socrates' fallacious arguments, see Szaif 2018, 35–36, 40 and McPherran 2012. On his non-rational strategies in general, see Rider, forthcoming and Brickhouse and Smith 2015.
6. See Gerson 2013, 37–38, 87 and Kamtekar 2012, 98–101, along with the essays Gerson cites.
7. Collins 2015, 5.
8. Nock 1933, 172, 181. On ancient conversion to philosophy, see the discussion and references in Eshleman 2007/2008.
9. I will draw mostly from Aikin and Talisse 2014, 3–55 and Talisse 2013; 2009. Other relevant works include van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004 and Misak 2004.
10. Haidt (2006, 2–4), among others, says our beliefs affect our actions far less than we tend to think. Arguably, his evidence suggests not this but simply that we are often mistaken about *which* beliefs guide our actions.
11. I quote and slightly modify Hedman 2017, 141, which paraphrases Paul Churchland.
12. This principle also is compatible with what epistemologists call externalism; as Talisse (2013, 510) puts it, "even the most ardent epistemological externalist can admit that having access to the evidence and reasons that support one's belief is a *desideratum* of cognitive life even if, in the end, they contend that it is not necessary for epistemic justification." And the principle is compatible with anti-evidentialism, since the point is not that we *should* not believe without sufficient evidence, but just that it is psychologically impossible to do so self-consciously except in certain atypical cases, such as special cases involving delusion or psychosis and perhaps certain cases of religious belief.
13. For that matter, thoroughness requires that we seek opposition not just in case our views are false, but even in case we already have the truth. As a lot of research has testified lately, our views tend to grow more extreme when we talk only with likeminded people (see esp. Sunstein 2017). If, say, we are pro-life and discuss abortion only with others who are pro-life, we may move from condoning abortion only in cases of rape or incest, to thinking abortion is wrong in every instance, even though our initial view might have been correct.

14. This view is most often associated with Nussbaum (1990), perhaps, but it has spread far. Even Stump (2010, 25) endorses it.
15. Hadot (1995, 158–60) suggests that one of Socrates' tactics, detectable in parts of the *Symposium*, especially, is to pretend to be in love with someone so that they will fall in love with Socrates. In Hadot's view, Socrates does this in order to lure the person into philosophy: what characterizes Socrates first and foremost is his desire to know the Forms, so that to fall in love with him is to fall in love with an erotic attraction to the Forms and, in turn, to be drawn into pursuing knowledge of them. There are similar claims in Lear 1998, 154–61 and Nehamas and Woodruff 1989, xxiv–xxv. Socrates may misbehave in other ways, too, such as by deliberately offering fallacious arguments (see the text to note 5 in §1.1 above) and publicly shaming people, including Euthyphro, e.g., who is already down and out.
16. See esp. 9a1–b4, 11b9–c7, d3–e5, 12a4–7, 14d4–6, 15b7–c3, c5–6, 20d4–e1. Other relevant passages include 6c9–d4, 7c12, 8a10, 9b7–8, d8–10, 11a6–8, 13e7–9, 14b8–c3. Euthyphro indicates at 11b that he is doing his best, but Socrates persists in saying that Euthyphro is withholding his wisdom (see esp. 14b8–c3).
17. Plus, the friendlier Socrates is and the more comfortable his interlocutors feel, maybe the more likely they are to convey core views that they hold, in which case they can benefit more from Socrates' scrutiny. People may often be unsure quite what they believe, or they may struggle to articulate it, especially under pressure; and elenctic scrutiny will help them more if it is directed at beliefs that actually guide their lives, as Socrates himself thinks, according to certain commentators (e.g., Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 12–14). This even is thought to be the motivation behind Socrates' "say what you believe" requirement (on which, see Shaw 2015, 80–81 with 81n.17).
18. Of course, strictly speaking, you have other options, too. For one, instead of affirming or attacking his claims right away, you can buy some time by telling him: "What you say is intriguing. I'll need to think about whether it's true." The longer you wait, though, the more you invite him to assume that refuting him is difficult. And unless you raise objections at *some* point, he will probably keep calling himself an expert. He does seem wedded to the claim that he is. He has continued to make this claim when other Athenians have laughed at him as if he were crazy (μαινομένου: 3c2) and when his own father has rejected his claim before Euthyphro even prosecuted him (4c8–9).
19. 4e9. Perhaps Euthyphro would say that his knowledge of the truth of *that* claim is not part of his knowledge of the divine. If so, he might not feel threatened if Socrates questioned that claim. And Socrates could do it in an upbeat, friendly way (in a tone of "Don't you see? You're *so* great that you'd be useful either way").
20. See note 18 in §1.2.1 above.
21. Aikin (2011, 267) also holds that, in certain argumentative exchanges, "it would be inappropriate to be *minimally* adversarial" (emphasis in the original). He thinks we should proportion "our argumentative heat to (i) the seriousness of the argumentative errors of the other side, (ii) the value of the points at issue (what consequences hang on the resolutions), and by an extension of (i) and (ii), (iii) the character of those who would reason so shabbily and direct their attention so uncritically when things matter as much as they do."
22. There, of course, might be ways to combine abrasiveness with gentleness, but that is unimportant here, so I ignore it for the sake of simplicity.

23. See, e.g., 9b7–8, 12a4–5, 14d4–6. And consider this exchange, quoted in the next chapter:

> [Euthyphro:] I do not follow what you are saying, Socrates.
> [Socrates:] Yet you are younger than I by as much as you are wiser. As I say, you are making difficulties because of your wealth of wisdom. Pull yourself together, my dear sir. What I am saying is not difficult to grasp. (12a3–7)

You might imagine that, instead of responding the way he does here, Socrates says simply: "Let me put it differently," and then tries again.

24. I think you *could* address this question in following the plan outlined below; in my view, what is in a story can be different from what its author or original audience saw in it. But that view is controversial and inessential, so I set it aside.
25. In denying this, D'Alessandro (2016) represents a small minority. For a reply to him, see Motoarcă 2017.
26. I will simplify the two theories I am about to mention. For a seminal discussion of them, see Lewis 1983. For a summary of alternatives to them and variations on them, see Gatzia and Sotnak 2014.
27. See the summary in Woodward 2011, 162: On the one hand, this theory "seems to entail that it is true in [Charles Dickens'] *Bleak House* that God exists, simply because Victorian Britain was overtly theistic (and Dickens didn't tell us otherwise)." On the other hand, the theory "seems, incorrectly, to smuggle into fictional worlds many of the prejudices that prevailed when a fiction was created. But *surely* it's not true in many, many fictions that non-whites are inferior to whites, or that women are worse at mathematics than men, if these things are incidental to the fiction."
28. On the modern term 'fiction' in relation to antiquity, see esp. Gill 1993, 69–70. The modern issue "What is fiction?" is complicated; see esp. Matravers 2014.
29. On who the historical Euthyphro may have been, see Nails 2002, 153. The character and the historical person would be identical to each other only if Plato's *Euthyphro* were a transcript of an actual conversation; and the *Euthyphro* may not even be historical; see Tulin 1996, 65–71.
30. I recognize that, according to some philosophers, there are many narratives, including works of literature, that function as thought experiments. For discussion, see Repp 2014.
31. This argument originally appeared in Searle 1980.
32. Thomson 1971, 48–49.
33. Jackson 2004, 51.
34. I should add a slight qualification. Consider the following story (in Ichikawa and Jarvis 2009, 222), which is supposed to lead us to the sort of conclusion that Edmund Gettier drew:

> Joe had left his watch at home, and he wanted to know what time it was. He saw a clock on the wall. As a proficient reader of clocks, Joe had no difficulty in determining that the clock read 10:15. 'Good,' thought Joe, 'I still have fifteen minutes until Mr. Pumbleton will be expecting me.' Joe had arranged an important meeting at 10:30.
>
> However, things were not as they appeared, for Joe had been looking at an inaccurate clock—it was 15 minutes slow. It was already 10:30. But fate smiled on Joe that day—for due to a careless error on the part of Mr. Pumbleton's secretary, Mr. Pumbleton thought Joe's appointment was at 10:45. So Joe's belief about how much time he had until Mr. Pumbleton would consider him late was true after all.

When we read this story, we are supposed to think that Joe had justified true belief which is not knowledge. Most likely, then, it is implicitly true in the story that, e.g., the clock that Joe looked at was the only clock available to him. (It would be a problem if, say, there were many clocks on the wall and each of them displayed a different time, since in that case Joe's belief might not be justified.) Even if, in real life, for some reason, a person in Joe's circumstances would had to have surveyed dozens of clocks before deciding it was only 10:15, it probably would still be true in the story that Joe checked only one clock. This seems consistent, though, with my point here above.

35. Granted, Thomson asks us to make a moral judgment, and our moral judgments, perhaps, never *can* depend on an author or the author's culture, even when our moral judgments are about the events in a fiction. On so-called imaginative resistance, see Brock 2012.
36. You could do something similar with dialogues such as the *Euthydemus*, *Phaedo*, and *Symposium*, which are stories within stories. (In the *Symposium*, e.g., Socrates tells a tale within a story told by Aristodemus, which is part of a story told by Apollodorus.) Of course, you would not *have* to ignore Socrates' narration in the *Republic*, e.g.: you could imagine Socrates telling the story as a way of protrepticizing his listener(s), and you could ask how effective this tactic would probably be on one sort of listener or another. But this would be much the same as asking how promising the *Republic* is as a means by which Plato protrepticizes his readers.
37. And some commentators have, more or less. See §3.4 below on Peterson (2011), and see Yunis 2007 and Gallagher 2004.
38. One of the many notable differences between psychotherapy and protreptic is that psychotherapists often have permission to ask patients and clients for private details about themselves and can gain special insight into their psyches that way.
39. See DellaVigna and Gentzkow 2010 for one survey of work on persuasion.
40. Of course, educationists have discussed a kind of education that is unconventional. The sort of conversion produced by successful protreptic might be a form of what they have called transformative learning (see Grabove 1997 and Mezirow 1991). But it is hard to say whether it is, because it is not entirely clear what transformative learning is supposed to be. In fact, one widely noted article in the field (Newman 2012) argues forcefully that the term 'transformative learning' is murky enough that it should simply be abandoned. A number of educationists have responded by trying to clarify the term and reinvigorate the field, but they generally concede that there is still a lot of confusion and unclarity, despite how full of promise the discussion about transformative learning seems. Those who are concessive include Formenti and Dirkx (2014, 125) and Taylor and Cranton (2013). Those who are not include Brock (2015) and Illeris (2015, 46).
41. And e.g., our analyses, if they were thoughtful, would be worth publishing. At the least, they would be as solid as many essays in contemporary philosophy. In their published work, contemporary philosophers often just make guesses about what other people's intuitions are. See Hershenov 2001, 133: "My intuition, and that of nearly all of those I have informally polled, is that [*p*]."
42. For years, modern-day military tacticians and business strategists also have used narratives about hypothetical future events (they call them "scenarios"), often in part to gauge what might happen. Van der Heijden (2005, 119) says that discussing scenarios is much like "using a wind-tunnel to test the model of an aircraft." For criticism of the use of scenarios, see Mintzberg 1994.

43. Searle 1999, 115.
44. The characters in Scruton's (1993), Murdoch's (1986), and Santayana's (1925) dialogues, e.g., are from ancient Greece, with one exception in Santayana's case. Perhaps it is an advantage, rather than a disadvantage, that Plato's dialogues are set in ancient Greece. As I have noted, we tend to associate protreptic with antiquity and with the modern classroom; for many people, it may be hard to imagine anyone other than Socrates or a modern-day teacher practicing protreptic. Maybe until the idea grew more familiar, people's imagination would range more freely if they thought of antiquity.
45. Continuing an ancient tradition, figures such as Anselm, Berkeley, Hume, and Malebranche wrote philosophical dialogues. There also are dialogues associated with Augustine that might be part transcription, part fiction. And see the works cited in note 44 above. In contemporary literature and film that is realist and well crafted, the closest thing to protreptic may be in the 1957 movie *12 Angry Men*, and even its use is limited; see Marshall 2019.
46. At the least, they engage in it nowhere near as explicitly as Plato's characters do. I don't mean, of course, that Austen's novels are devoid of philosophical content.
47. Plato's dialogues also do not complete the sort of "emotional cadence" that Velleman (2003) describes, and accordingly they are not misleading in the way he warns against. Cotton (2014, 259) argues, in fact, that "Plato shapes plots that do not allow us to move towards the end, but keep us permanently caught in the present... ."
48. This sort of theory would be testable. To be sure, social scientists would need research questions specific enough to take the following form: "When someone of type-*1* is protrepticizing someone of type-*2* in circumstances of type-*3*, which of the following strategies—*X* or *Y*—is more likely to be effective?" But the category "type-*1*," however it was defined, could be a category of people with broad capabilities.
49. Suppose, e.g., that our initial theory made predictions like "Strategies *X*, *Y*, and *Z* are the most promising strategies to employ on someone of type-*1* in circumstances of type-*2*, provided that the person doing protreptic can use these strategies well." We might then divide protrepticizers into categories—e.g., a category of people who can employ strategies *X* and *Z* well, but not strategy *Y*; a category of people who can employ strategy *X* well in circumstances of type-*2*, but not in circumstances of type-*3*; etc. We could combine these categories with our initial theory and thereby have a schema for determining which strategies specific people should use on specific occasions.
50. Perhaps, then, you should suppose even that the Socrates in the *Euthyphro*, e.g., is the same character as the Socrates in dialogues that may be spurious, such as the *Alcibiades* and *Clitophon*. And incidentally, you probably should read all the dialogues together not only in forming judgments about Socrates but also in assessing his interlocutors. After all, the more of their behavior you examined, the more you would have to work with in forming your initial judgments about how they can behave; and in refining those judgments in the way described in §1.3.1 above, you could always subtract the information about them that you had gleaned from reading the dialogues together.
51. Some commentators also have been wary of interpreting a Platonic dialogue by comparing it with other Platonic dialogues; for discussion and criticism, see esp. Gerson 2013, 36ff. and Brickhouse and Smith 2010, 31–34. Charalabopoulos (2012, 4–6) and Gill (2006, 142) summarize

some recent criticism of developmentalist views such as the one mentioned in the text to this note. Some forms of developmentalism may be compatible with the last of my four suppositions, despite first appearances. E.g., Dancy's (2004) developmentalism is simply a way of classifying the arguments in Plato's dialogues and "the theories required by those arguments": Dancy is uninterested in "what was really going on in Plato's mind" and, perhaps, even what the texts indicate was really going on (11), and in that sense Dancy is similar to certain other commentators; see notes 3, 4, and 5 and the text to them in ch. 3 below. Yet whether the Socrates in the *Euthyphro*, e.g., has the same beliefs as the Socrates in the *Republic* may depend on whether Plato had the same beliefs when he wrote the two dialogues, how he conceived of each Socrates at the time, or what the texts indicate about either of those things. Also relevant, though not discussed in Plato studies, are certain questions about serial fiction, as aestheticians call it (e.g., McGonigal 2013), meaning series where the fiction is presented not all at once but in stages. Take, e.g., George Lucas' *Star Wars* movies. The second one, released in 1980, reveals that Darth Vader is Luke's father, but suppose that Lucas and his team had not had the idea for this plot twist when the first movie was released in 1977. In that case, what if a viewer in 1977 had watched the first movie and decided that Darth Vader is Luke's father? In 1977, would that belief have been true? If we answer "yes" and decide that all fiction works the same way (or that all fictive stories do), we can say both that Plato changed radically and that a single Socrates appears throughout the dialogues.

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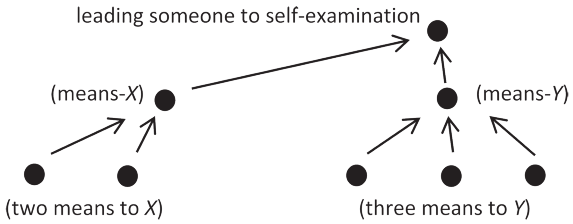
2 A Bottom-Up Approach: Reimagining Protreptic by Examining Socrates

There is a second approach that could and probably should supplement the approach I described in the previous chapter. There I imagined starting from the top of the schema I presented, a schema that can have a form like the following:



But as I mentioned, another way to study Socratic protreptic would be to start from the bottom and work your way up. In taking this second approach, you would consider specific ways Socrates behaves in the dialogues and ask what his motivation is. In the process, you would have the same four suppositions that underlie the other approach I have described; so you would suppose, in part, that Socrates' ultimate goal is protreptic. But you would ask how he tries to reach that goal, and you would start by examining his behavior at the micro-level.

In this chapter, I will briefly illustrate the bottom-up approach and the aim behind it, and then I will discuss the rationale for that aim. My illustration will involve a passage that appears in Plato's *Euthyphro* (11e7-12d4).

2.1 Deliberate Obscurity at *Euthyphro* 11e7-12d4

Here is a translation of the passage. I will use the labels below to refer to specific parts of it.

11e7 **[Soc.:]** And is then all that is just pious? Or is all that is pious just, but not all that is just pious, but some of it is and some is not? **part-A** 11e7-12a2

12a3 **[Euth.:]** I do not follow what you are saying, Socrates.

12a4 **[Soc.:]** Yet you are younger than I by as much as you are wiser. As I say, you are making difficulties because of your wealth of wisdom. Pull yourself together, my dear sir. What I am saying is not difficult to grasp. I am saying the opposite of what the poet said who wrote: **part-B** 12a7-b2

12a9

> You do not wish to name Zeus, who had done it, and who made all things grow, for where there is fear there is also shame.

12b2 I disagree with the poet. Shall I tell you why?

12b3 **[Euth.:]** Please do.

12b4 **[Soc.:]** I do not think that "where there is fear there is also shame," for I think that many people who fear disease and poverty and many other such things feel fear, but are not ashamed of the things they fear. Do you not think so? **part-C** 12b4-c6

12b8 **[Euth.:]** I do indeed.

12b9 **[Soc.:]** But where there is shame there is also fear. For is there anyone who, in feeling shame and embarrassment at anything, does not also at the same time fear and dread a reputation for wickedness?

12c2 **[Euth.:]** He is certainly afraid.

12c3 **[Soc.:]** It is then not right to say "where there is fear there is also shame," but that where there is shame there is also fear, for fear covers a larger area than shame. Shame is a part of fear just as odd is a part of number, with the result that it is not true that where there is number there is also oddness, but that where there is oddness there is also number. Do you follow me now? **part-D** 12c6-8

12c9 **[Euth.:]** Surely.

12c10 **[Soc.:]** This is the kind of thing I was asking before, whether where there is piety there is also justice, but where there is justice there is not always piety, for the pious is a part of justice. Shall we say that, or do you think otherwise? **part-E** 12c10 **part-F** 12d2-3

12d4 **[Euth.:]** No, but like that; for what you say appears to be right.

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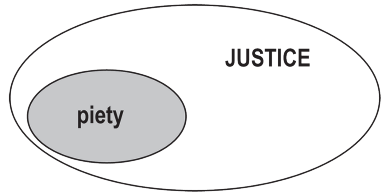
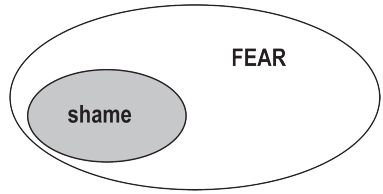
In the exchange leading up to this passage, Euthyphro claims emphatically to be an expert, and Socrates acts thrilled to hear it. He asks Euthyphro to share some of his great knowledge by explaining what piety is, and Euthyphro makes repeated attempts, all of which fail. Under Socrates' scrutiny, Euthyphro's first answer falls apart, then his second, and his third, and so on, so that Euthyphro ends up looking worse and worse. The conversation takes place near the king-archon's court, so there is likely to be a crowd of onlookers. Understandably, then, Euthyphro finally explodes at Socrates in frustration (11b6-d2). Soon thereafter, we come to the passage quoted above.

In this passage, Socrates' questions seem designed to lead Euthyphro to some sort of thesis. But Socrates' first question (**part-A**) is rather obscure; and things quickly get worse. My claim will be that Socrates is more obscure here than the content of his questions requires him to be and that his obscurity, in fact, is a device he uses deliberately.[1] I point to it as an example of a device that one can scrutinize in studying Socratic protreptic.[2]

Throughout the passage, what Socrates *means* is, on the whole, pretty simple. Basically, all he asks in **part-A**, for instance, is whether piety is part of justice, as he later puts it (in **part-F**). In effect, Euthyphro is asked just whether the following diagram is accurate:



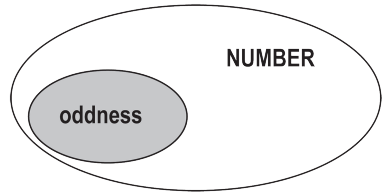
And in effect, all Socrates asks Euthyphro in **part-C** is whether *this* diagram is accurate:



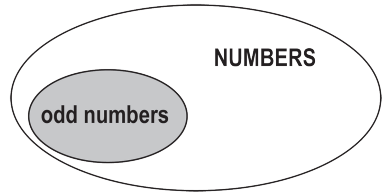
The bit about shame and fear (**part-C**) is just an illustrative analogy. **Part-C** fits with **part-A** insofar as **part-C** highlights the fact that the question in **part-A** is simply a question about part and whole. (In particular, **part-E** makes this evident.)

So this whole passage (11e7-12d4) is far more cumbersome than it needs to be: Socrates could have communicated much more plainly and straightforwardly than he does. For example, instead of waiting until **part-F** to ask whether piety is part of justice, he could have put the question so simply in the first place (in **part-A**). Granted, even if he did this, perhaps he would still need to remind Euthyphro what parts and wholes are. But to offer a reminder, Socrates would hardly need to lead Euthyphro through the detour in **part-C**, much less the bit about the poet in **part-B**. At the least, instead of likening piety and justice to *shame*

and fear, Socrates could liken piety and justice to *oddness and number*. On his terms, oddness and number, like shame and fear, are analogous to piety and justice.[3]



And Socrates' point about oddness and number is far more intuitive than his claims about shame and fear are. The point is just that odd numbers are a subset of numbers.



Yet as it is, Socrates does not get to this point until **part-D**, after he has talked at some length about shame and fear and made the tangled reference to the poets.[4]

In fact, Socrates muddies the waters even more than I have suggested so far. Among other reasons, he implies the following,[5] which we can call the *contra-poet view*:

(**CPV**) To say that piety is a part of justice is to deny that fear is a part of shame.

(**CPV**) is strange. Contrast it with this view, for example:

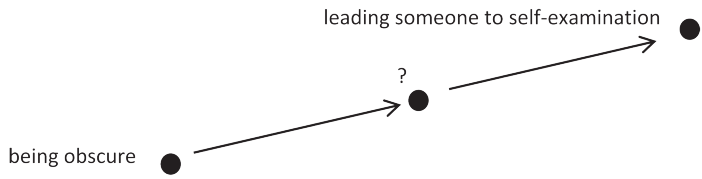
(**DMF**) To say that dogs are mammals is to deny that dogs are fish.

It is easy to see that (**DMF**) is true, since mammals, by definition, are not fish. By contrast, it is hard to imagine why (**CPV**) is supposed to be true. If Socrates' listeners notice that he implies (**CPV**), they may wonder what his reason is for believing it, and they may expect him to offer an explanation at some point. Yet he never does; and in fact, he acts as if he has not implied (**CPV**). Apparently, he implies (**CPV**) just for the sake of misdirection.

In the final estimation, then, he muddies the waters quite a bit. In fact, his statements are not just obscure—they are *far* more obscure than necessary—and he is smart enough to see this. So it is safe to say that his obscurity here is deliberate.

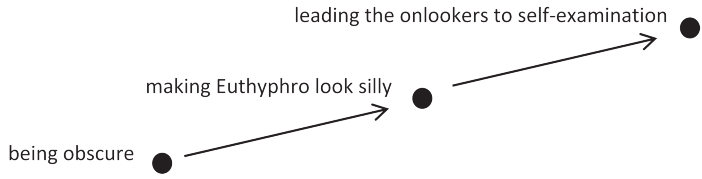
2.2 Thinking With Socrates

You would consider all of this in taking the bottom-up approach. And if you decided that Socrates deliberately obfuscates in this passage, your next question would be why he does so. Again, you would assume that his obscurity is part of some *protreptic* strategy, meaning that its purpose is ultimately to lead someone to self-examination. But you would ask how it is supposed to do that.

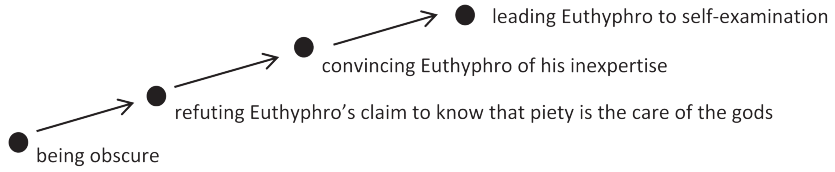


Asking questions like that one, and asking them in a range of cases, would be the best way to identify strategies to evaluate when you later took the approach described in the previous chapter. In particular, it is how you would think of strategies you had overlooked or underappreciated; and you would want to think of as many strategies as you could, so as to find the ones that are most worth studying.

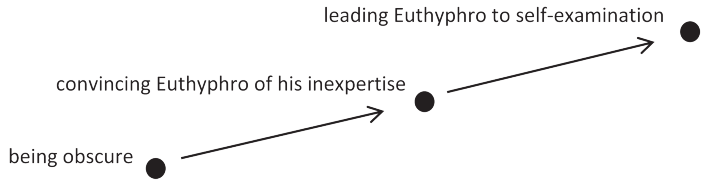
Now, *answering* these questions would be difficult, and maybe even impossible. But that would actually count in your favor. For an example, take, again, the passage I just discussed. The difficulty in analyzing it is that there are many reasons Socrates may have for being obscure here, and it is hard to narrow the pool of candidates much. One possibility, for instance, is that he uses obscurity to toy with Euthyphro for the sake of the bystanders who are listening to the conversation. Socrates may be playing a trick on Euthyphro and may think the onlookers are smart enough to catch on to this and be in on the joke. (At least, Socrates may think that *some* of them will catch on and be amused. Think, for example, of the youth mentioned in Plato's *Apology* who take pleasure in watching Socrates question people; 23c.) Socrates may want to make Euthyphro look silly to them so that they are more likely to identify with Socrates and more likely to hope to avoid being as philosophically inept as Euthyphro is.



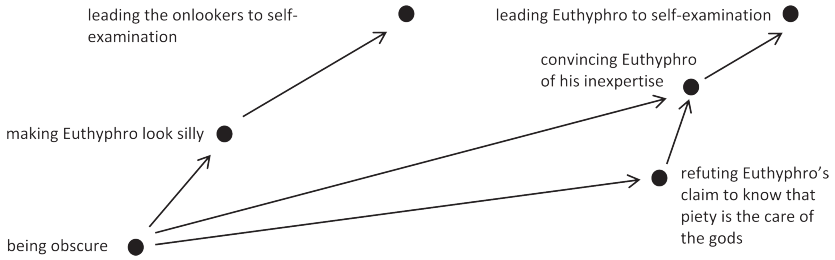
Another possibility is that Socrates uses obscurity to bedazzle Euthyphro. Certain obscurity, when it is crafted in the right way, "creates an aura of importance," as one contemporary philosopher puts it,[6] so that once your listeners finally make sense of what you say, it seems to them more plausible or profound than it actually is. Perhaps Socrates' obscurity is supposed to affect Euthyphro this way. Socrates may want Euthyphro to accept the idea that Socrates is about to propose—the idea that piety is part of justice—so that Euthyphro will go on to say that piety is "the care of the gods" (12e8) and Socrates then can refute Euthyphro's claim to know that this is what piety is. (This, in fact, is just what happens as the conversation progresses.)


leading Euthyphro to self-examination
convincing Euthyphro of his inexpertise
refuting Euthyphro's claim to know that piety is the care of the gods
being obscure

More simply, Socrates may want to overwhelm Euthyphro. The point of refuting any of Euthyphro's claims to knowledge might be to convince him that he is not an expert; and like being refuted, struggling even to understand Socrates might deepen Euthyphro's sense that he is outmatched and out of his depth and that being an expert is much harder than he has thought.



Yet another possibility is that Socrates adopts all three of these strategies.


leading the onlookers to self-examination
leading Euthyphro to self-examination
convincing Euthyphro of his inexpertise
making Euthyphro look silly
refuting Euthyphro's claim to know that piety is the care of the gods
being obscure

And of course, Socrates might have still other strategies, too. In this case and many others, there is a range of possible reasons he behaves the way he does.

So he often would be difficult to interpret. Again, though, this would work to your advantage. Ultimately, your goal would be not to figure out what his strategies actually are (in other words, to find *the correct* interpretation of the fictive character Socrates) but just to think of tactics that are available to him.

Now, for that reason you would *try* to interpret Socrates correctly in a certain respect: you would look for the interpretation that made the most sense under your four suppositions. Trying to interpret someone correctly can lead us to ideas that otherwise might not have occurred to us. A number of scholars have said as much about interpreting the philosophical arguments of historical figures such as Aristotle, Descartes, and Plato,[7] and the point applies also to interpreting the behavior of a fictive character like Plato's Socrates. When you tried to make sense of his actions, you would be under certain constraints—you would have to figure out what reasons *he* might have for doing what he does; and the harder his reasons were to identify, the more inventive you would have to be.

Ultimately, though, your aim would be just to discover new ideas and to refine the ideas you already had about strategies Socrates *might* employ. The more strategies you thought of, the better. Once you identified them, you could evaluate them to see whether they are *promising* strategies.

Why have such a modest goal? For example, why aim only for interpretations that are correct in a certain respect instead of correct, period? If working under constraints could make you more creative, why not tighten the constraints you were under by trying to interpret Socrates without the help of your four suppositions? Part of the answer is that those suppositions might be false, or at least some of them might be. Yet if they are and you factored this into your interpretations, your interpretations would be less useful than they could be for forming a theory of protreptic. Again, if you decided that Socrates wants to promote Platonism, for example, then your interpretations might help Platonists,

but would be of limited value for everyone else. The sort of protreptic that is of widest interest is not specific to Plato or Socrates but aims to lead people to inquiry of the most basic sort. Of course, you could try to show, then, that the four suppositions are *true*. But the point of analyzing the passage would be to form better ideas about protreptic, in my sense of the word, and showing that your suppositions were true would not bring you any closer to that goal. It would tell you something about the Platonic texts, but it would not help you think of new protreptic strategies or refine your thoughts about protreptic: it would tell you nothing about protreptic that you could not learn just by working under your four suppositions.

2.3 Five Questions About Socrates

Just now I explained part of the rationale for the bottom-up approach; let me spell out the rest. I explained why it is that, when you analyzed a particular passage or dialogue, you would ask simply which interpretation made the most sense under your four suppositions; but also notable is that you would only *try* to determine which interpretation that is. If, ultimately, a range of competing interpretations were equally plausible, you would not insist on narrowing them down to one. Why not?

The reason is that there are cases where it probably would be too difficult to narrow them down that much, regardless of what your suppositions were.[8] The *Euthyphro* passage discussed above is one such case, I think; when you considered the possible motives for Socrates' behavior in that passage, you would be hard-pressed to eliminate all but one. (Assume that his one motive might be multifold, meaning that it might be to achieve not only purpose *X* but also purposes *Y* and *Z*, as long as *X*, *Y*, and *Z* are compatible with one another.) That passage could help you, and you might as well linger or even focus on it, if your goal were to think of strategies you had overlooked or underappreciated; in that case, the more possibilities that occurred to you, the better. But you would need to bracket that passage if you ultimately wanted a single correct interpretation in each case you examined.

The same goes for many other passages in Plato's dialogues. Let me name some of them. In the following, I will pose five questions about how Socrates behaves in specific parts of the dialogues, questions which are probably unimportant unless Socratic protreptic interests us, but which are worth addressing if it does. My goal will be not to shed new light on Plato but to illustrate my point concisely. In presenting each of the five questions, I will consider some ways of responding to it. In each case, I think, it probably is too difficult to narrow the possibilities enough to find a single correct answer. I will simply describe each case

and leave it to readers who are familiar with Plato to see whether they agree. Other readers may have no basis for judgment, but even so, the rest of this section should be of use to them.

2.3.1 *Concession in the Charmides*

In the *Charmides*, Socrates talks with Charmides and Critias about what temperance is. At one point, Critias proposes that it is a sort of knowledge, and he agrees that it therefore must be a science (165c). Socrates suggests that, in order to be a science, it must produce something, the way the science of medicine produces health and the science of housebuilding produces houses, and he asks Critias what temperance produces that is analogous to health and houses. Critias objects to the question, challenging Socrates to say what calculation and geometry produce that is analogous to health and houses, and Critias adds defiantly that Socrates won't be able to answer. In response, Socrates concedes, saying: "You are right" (166a3), and he withdraws his question and replaces it with another that is similar. Why does he concede instead of defending the claim?

Perhaps he simply cannot defend it, and he realizes this only once he is challenged. He may be improvising a lot, as he says he is. At one point, he even asks for a moment to think things over (165c).

But maybe Socrates *can* defend the claim and just sees no need to. (Even after conceding, he still is able to refute Critias.) Or, if he cannot defend the claim, maybe he is aware of this from the outset. He may ask the question about medicine and housebuilding as a way of testing Critias to gauge how credulous he is. If Critias had gone along with the question, perhaps Socrates then would have asked other questions that are even more loaded.[9]

Maybe, also or instead, Socrates concedes to Critias so as to seem to Charmides to have faltered. Charmides is young and impressionable, and to him Socrates may look like a towering figure, since he has quite a reputation among Critias' friends (157a) and, even while claiming not to know what temperance is, has refuted Charmides summarily and has had the upper hand so far with Critias.[10] So seeing even Socrates stumble in this discussion might impress upon Charmides how difficult the topic of the discussion is. And quite likely, this is what Socrates wants; presumably, he wants Charmides to sense how hard it is to define temperance and, in turn, how far Charmides has to go before he can tell whether he is temperate. Early on, Socrates asks Charmides whether he is temperate (158c)—this, in fact, is what prompts the whole discussion of temperance—and at the end of the dialogue, Socrates raises the question again, whereupon Charmides says that *he* surely does not know, if even Critias and Socrates are unable to explain what temperance is (176a6-b1).

2.3.2 *Delay in the Hippias Minor*

In the *Hippias Minor*, Socrates cross-examines Hippias, a Sophist who brags about his intellectual abilities. At first, Hippias acts sure that he can answer any question, but soon some of his claims seem to conflict with others that Socrates draws out of him, and Hippias realizes he is in trouble: his replies change from confident (for example, "Yes, by Zeus"; 367a8) to hesitant or even sheepish ("That's the way it appears," 368a6; "So it seems," a7). When Socrates then poses a particularly difficult question and asks Hippias to answer it, Hippias admits he is stumped, saying: "I can't [answer] …" (369a3). In posing the decisive question, Socrates speaks at length (368a8-369a2)—far longer than at any previous point in the dialogue (Hippias, incidentally, has asked him to keep his questions brief; 365d5) and longer than the content of his question probably requires. Why does Socrates speak for so long?

Perhaps he does so simply to emphasize how striking it will be if Hippias falls short—to emphasize it to Hippias, the other people listening to the conversation, or both. Hippias has beaten his chest both in this conversation and many other times before, and this is in large part what Socrates describes in the course of posing the question. Maybe he talks for so long just to make sure everyone remembers how much Hippias has claimed about himself.

But maybe there is a different reason. Many of Socrates' arguments in this dialogue, especially, can look like parlor tricks, at least to the unschooled.[11] (Later Hippias even charges Socrates with arguing "unfairly"—κακουργοῦντι, 373b5; cf. 369b8-c2.) Socrates' listeners might suspect, at this point or later, that Socrates is just bamboozling Hippias, and Socrates may want to offset that impression. When he speaks for so long in posing his question, perhaps he does this so that Hippias will have time to think, or so that it will be clear to everyone listening that Hippias has had a fair chance to come up with an answer.

And maybe Socrates talks for so long both to give Hippias time to think *and* to emphasize how significant it will be if Hippias has no answer to give. Having no answer will be particularly bad if he will have had time to search for one.

2.3.3 *The Order in the Laches*

In the *Laches*, Socrates and his interlocutors consider four accounts of what courage is, and they find problems with each of them. First, Laches proposes that courage is staying at one's post and not retreating (190e-192b), that courage is endurance of the soul (192c-d), and that courage is *wise* endurance of the soul (192d-193d), and then Nicias argues that courage is a sort of wisdom (194c-199e). Does Socrates engineer the discussion so that it goes in this order?

He may have a motive for doing so. Nicias' account of courage might be the one Socrates accepts;[12] and regardless, Socrates might find it especially useful as a protreptic device, since it orients a person toward seeking wisdom. So he may want his listeners to favor it over the other definitions, and thus he may prefer that it emerge last in the conversation. The order in which you present ideas and problems can affect which of them your audience gravitates toward. Think, for example, of cases where the solution to each of two equally vexing problems affects what the solution is to the other, and affirming *p* helps us solve the one problem but keeps us from solving the other, while affirming not-*p* helps us solve the other problem but keeps us from solving the first problem. In cases like that, if you present the one problem before you present the other, your audience oftentimes may be more invested in solving the first problem than in solving the second one, so that they are more likely to affirm *p* than not-*p*. By contrast, when a group of philosophical novices try out one response to an issue, run into difficulties, and then struggle at length when they experiment with another response, often they will favor the second response over the first, because of how frustrating it would be to loop back to the first response after discussing the second response for so long. The novices in the *Laches*, perhaps, will do the same sort of thing, and Socrates may realize this.

Moreover, he may have not only a motive but also the insight needed for controlling the order of the discussion. On the one hand, he may have a good sense of what Laches will say courage is. Laches' accounts of courage are intuitive—they naturally spring to mind when one is first asked to define courage—so they are what we can expect from someone who is earnest but rather new to philosophical discussion, as Laches seems to be—someone who has not had occasion to develop a fancier definition. On the other hand, Socrates probably can predict that Nicias, by contrast, will have something more elaborate to say. Nicias and Socrates seem to know each other fairly well—well enough for Nicias to have heard Socrates claim in other conversations that courage is a sort of wisdom, if Nicias is right that Socrates has made that claim (194d), and well enough, evidently, for Socrates to know that Nicias has been influenced by Sophists and can borrow from them a definition of courage, as he apparently does.[13]

Finally, just as Socrates may have the motive and insight to engineer the discussion, he also has the opportunity to do so, since he determines when Laches and Nicias each offer their accounts of courage. It is Socrates who decides that Laches will speak first (Socrates begins by addressing Laches, though Socrates could have started with Nicias, at 190b), and it is Socrates who prompts Nicias to define courage once Laches' definitions have floundered (194b-c).

Yet there is still a chance that Socrates is less calculated than all of this imagines. Maybe the only reason he has Laches go first, for example, is

that Laches is the one who has just spoken at that point in the dialogue. And when Socrates asks for Nicias' account of courage once Laches' definitions have failed, maybe Socrates just wants to give Laches a rest, since Laches is sincere and exasperated (194a-b) and admits he has fallen short.[14]

2.3.4 *Two Options in the Ion*

In the *Ion*, Socrates questions Ion to the point where he is at a loss (533c), and then Socrates proposes that, as a rhapsode, Ion doesn't have knowledge but instead is inspired or possessed by a god. Socrates repeats the point over and over (533d-534e, 536b-d) and, at the end of the dialogue, asks Ion to choose how he wants to be thought of—as someone who has done wrong by withholding his knowledge from Socrates, or as someone divine. Why, at any point, does Socrates offer him the second option? Socrates might genuinely believe that rhapsodes and poets are inspired,[15] but he doesn't have to tell Ion this. He could simply suggest that Ion lacks knowledge, and leave it at that. As long as Ion thinks he is divinely inspired, he may not care whether he lacks knowledge; he may stay as nonchalant as he is at the end of the dialogue. So why give him an out?

One possibility is that Socrates wants a delayed reaction: perhaps he tries to put Ion at ease during the conversation so that Ion will keep talking with Socrates, agree to Socrates' proposal for the moment, and then have concerns about it sometime later. Of course, Ion is dense, as many commentators have noted, and he may be too unreflective to think about the conversation once it has ended. But if he looks back on it at all, he may remember the parts where Socrates said that poets and rhapsodes who are divinely inspired are out of their minds (533e-534c, 535b-d). That suggestion is prone to bother Ion, and he even objects to it at one point (536d). He accepts it at first (535d) and later on simply because it doesn't quite register for him then. Socrates' hope may be that eventually Ion will put two and two together again and grow less comfortable with having inspiration instead of knowledge.

Another possibility is that Socrates thinks Ion is a lost cause,[16] and Socrates' target is not Ion himself but any bystanders who are overhearing the conversation. Maybe there are no bystanders (readers generally suppose not, of course), but maybe there are; the *Ion* gives no indication either way. And if there are, Socrates may mean for *them* to put two and two together. Perhaps Socrates wants them to see the trouble with following a poet blindly, as Ion does with Homer, instead of forming thoughts of one's own.[17]

Still another possibility is that Socrates means for Ion to accept Socrates' proposal so that Ion will tell other people that he lacks knowledge. Perhaps Ion is too dense to think that lacking knowledge is a

problem, but other people may be smart enough to catch on. And if they do, then maybe they will be less enamored of rhapsodes and even poetry and thereby more open to philosophy.

2.3.5 *Switching Respondents in the Philebus*

The *Philebus* opens in the middle of a conversation in which Philebus has argued that pleasure is the good for human beings, and Socrates has maintained that knowledge is. Philebus has refused to continue the debate, and Protarchus has agreed to take his place defending hedonism; so as the dialogue progresses, Socrates talks mainly with Protarchus. But Philebus sticks around and rejoins the conversation at times, and on occasion Socrates even asks him questions to pull him back into the conversation. How does Socrates decide when to involve Philebus again?

To narrow that question, take, for example, the last point in the dialogue where Socrates addresses Philebus (27e). In this passage, there is plenty of pretext for involving Philebus: Socrates has asked him questions twice already (11c, 12a); at one point, so has Protarchus (17e); and twice Philebus has interjected on his own (18d-e, 22c). But it also would make sense for Socrates just to keep talking with Protarchus instead of bringing Philebus back into the conversation. For a long time up to this point, Philebus has been silent, and the conversation has been strictly between Socrates and Protarchus. Plus, Protarchus has tried twice to minimize Philebus' role in the conversation (12a, 15c; cf. 19a5-8), saying at one point, for example: "It might be best not to bother [Philebus] with questions any further, but let sleeping dogs lie" (15c8-9); and Philebus has vowed again to stay out (12b). So the last time Socrates addresses him, what is Socrates' reason for bringing him back in?

The answer may be simple. There is a group of young Athenians who are listening (16a); maybe Socrates just wants to provide some variation in the conversation in order to hold their attention. Variation can help keep an audience attentive. Hence, for example, modern-day news reports sometimes change camera angles during a long interview, or switch back and forth between clips of the interview and narration from the reporter.

But Socrates' reason may be more involved. One possibility is that he hopes Philebus will agree to what he has proposed, or at least admit an inability to refute it. At this point in the dialogue, Socrates has made considerable headway: Protarchus has relented under a lot of Socrates' arguments, such that the momentum of the conversation is in Socrates' direction to a large degree. Getting even *Philebus* to relent would make a big impression on the group of young listeners, since, whereas Protarchus merely favors hedonism, Philebus is sold out to it entirely

("To my mind, pleasure wins and will always win, no matter what"; 12a7). Socrates does seem to care whether he sways the young listeners. At one point earlier, when Socrates makes a comment about young people, Protarchus replies:

> Careful, Socrates, don't you see what a crowd [πλῆθος] we are and that we are all young? And are you not afraid that we will gang up against you with Philebus if you insult us? (16a4-6)

In response, Socrates speaks to both Protarchus and all the other young men and addresses them as "my boys, as Philebus calls you."[18] This is a small detail but a significant one, given what it might mean to call them one's boys. In using that expression, Philebus may have suggested that they have solidarity with him, and Socrates might be indicating that their sympathies are about to change. (In fact, he might want to plant in them the idea of agreeing with *him*, if they are in the habit of following Philebus.) Further, in calling them his boys Philebus may have implied even that he has them in his pocket, and Socrates might want them to notice this, so that they resent the idea and hope to prove it wrong, maybe not consciously, but at some level. Either way, he has the crowd in mind.

Another possibility is that Socrates has no hope of shifting Philebus.[19] The last time Socrates pulls him back into the conversation, the goal may be for him to react snappishly, as he does (27e-28b), and for Protarchus to turn on him and side with Socrates, as Protarchus does ("Socrates is right in this, Philebus; we must obey him"; 28b4-5). This might help Protarchus be mindful of his growing distance from Philebus. More important, once Philebus has been nasty and Protarchus has turned on him, the crowd might do the same—or, if they are sympathetic to Philebus and think Protarchus is being too agreeable, someone in the crowd might speak up, whereupon Socrates can address their concerns. Either way, dividing Protarchus against Philebus could help Socrates.

And of course, Socrates' reason for drawing Philebus back in may be some combination of the possibilities I have named, and it might be none of them. Maybe his motive is different from anything I have pictured.

2.4 Knowing Socrates' Projects

In each of the cases I described just now, there is a range of possible reasons Socrates acts as he does, and I am skeptical that you could narrow them down to one. I imagine my skepticism will make sense to readers who are familiar with the passages I have discussed. But to be thorough enough, I should close this chapter by considering an objection.

Bernard Williams makes a point that can clarify what the objection is.[20] As he puts it, we explain a person's behavior in terms of their beliefs, actions, and projects, and knowing two of the three items in that trio can sometimes help us infer the third. If we know what the person's actions and projects are, we may be able to infer what their beliefs are; for example, when we see them walk unhesitatingly across a bridge and we know that one of their projects is to avoid drowning, we can infer that they believe the bridge is safe. Similarly, we may be able to predict their actions if we know their beliefs and projects, and we may be able to infer their projects if we know their actions and beliefs.

I mention this because to identify Socrates' protreptic strategies would be to identify certain projects of his (for example, the project of being deliberately obscure for the sake of making someone look silly), so it might seem that you could discern his protreptic strategies if you knew enough about his actions and his beliefs—in particular, his beliefs about what the best means of protreptic are in the situations he is in. Knowing his actions is easy, of course; they are simply what the dialogues depict.[21] So all you would need, we might think, is to know his beliefs. The objection, accordingly, is that my skepticism is misplaced because you could decipher Socrates' beliefs in light of what he says in the dialogues—or you could infer Plato's beliefs and, in turn, Socrates' from what Socrates and various other figures in the dialogues say. Thereby you could know all of Socrates' strategies: you could make sense of even the tough cases I named in the previous section.

The idea behind this objection is appealing, and there is something to it, of course. But the task is more difficult than it suggests, and I doubt the task is manageable quite yet, at least. The problem is that there are too few statements in the dialogues that are relevant and exact enough. Let me illustrate why. I will not try to cover every passage that might reveal Socrates' beliefs, but my examples will be representative enough to let me generalize.

2.4.1 *Beliefs About People*

Suppose, first, that you wanted to understand why Socrates is obscure in the *Euthyphro* passage discussed above. Part of what clouds his meaning in that passage are his comments in it about fear and shame (12b-c), and what is odd about those comments and requires an explanation is that they are out of place: he need not make them in order to convey his main point. In trying to explain them, you might compare this passage with other parts of the *Euthyphro*. There are other passages where Socrates refers to fear (4e, 15d) and one passage where he even mentions fear of acting wrongly (15d4-e1). These are examples of one sort of passage I want to discuss; it can seem that these passages would help you uncover

one of Socrates' beliefs and, in turn, one of his projects. Since he so often talks about fear and once even mentions fear of acting wrongly, you might conclude that he believes his interlocutor needs to think about fear and that, in the original passage, being obscure is not his main goal; rather, his project, in Williams' language, is to make Euthyphro ponder fear, so Socrates works in a reference to fear even where it doesn't quite fit, and he allows some obscurity just as a consequence.[22] This explanation would account for his obscurity in part.

The problem, though, is that it would also raise questions such as *why* Euthyphro needs to think about fear, in Socrates' view. For example, does Socrates suspect that Euthyphro is afraid of acting wrongly and needs to admit this to himself? Does Socrates, instead, think that Euthyphro is unduly confident and ought to *become* fearful? That is, instead of wanting Euthyphro to own up to being fearful already, does Socrates aim to *instill* fear in Euthyphro? You would need to answer questions like those in order to understand quite what Socrates is trying to do, and it would be hard to find answers until you knew some of his views on human psychology.

Of course, you might then examine what he says about the soul. He says nothing direct about it in the *Euthyphro*, but he is explicit elsewhere. In the *Republic*, for example, he lays out a theory on which there are three parts of the soul—a reasoning part, an appetitive part, and a spirited part—and a person is characterized by whichever of the three is dominant in them. Though this theory of tripartition is not psychology in the modern sense of the word, it would be worth considering. If you could determine that Socrates accepts the tripartite psychology in the *Euthyphro* and thinks Euthyphro is ruled by, say, the spirited part of his soul, you might have a better idea of what Socrates believes Euthyphro's motivation is and, in turn, how Socrates means to help him.

Socrates, though, might *not* accept the tripartite psychology in the *Euthyphro*. Among other reasons, whether he accepts it there might depend on whether Plato does, and Plato may not have even conceived of the tripartite psychology at the point when he wrote the *Euthyphro*: he may have written it long before he wrote the *Republic* and at an early stage in his philosophical development.[23]

More important, it would help only so much to determine that, in Socrates' view, Euthyphro is ruled by the spirited part of his soul. It might show you what problem Socrates wants to solve, or give you a *general* idea of what the problem is, but it would not tell you specifically how he intends to fix the problem. You could *speculate* about how he means to do it, but you would have little to go on. In this case and many others,[24] there would be a lot of dots to connect, and they would be pretty far apart.

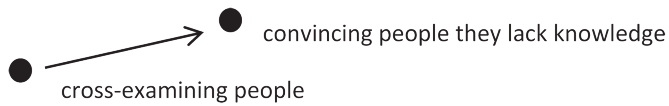
2.4.2 *Beliefs About Method*

One way to narrow the distance between them might be to learn what Socrates' beliefs about method are, meaning simply what he thinks are the best means to employ in order to change other people. Here, too, however, it would be hard to find what you needed in the dialogues. There are passages that are relevant, and some even have to do with method explicitly, but in the end they would take you only so far.

One example is a part of Plato's *Phaedrus* (261e-262b) where Socrates describes a means of deception, a way of duping one's audience in moving them "in small steps" (262a2: σμικρὸν μεταβαίνων) from one belief to its opposite. Roughly, what he has in mind, perhaps, is successively persuading them of a series of views, each of which seems just slightly different from the previous, but the last of which is the opposite of the first and is false.[25] Scholars disagree about whether Socrates endorses this means of deception,[26] but if this passage in its context reveals that he does, from it you might infer one of his beliefs: the belief that this technique is an effective and conscionable way to influence people.

Plato's *Sophist* also contains some comments on method, and they seem to involve Socrates even though they come from someone other than him—namely, the mysterious "visitor" who appears in this dialogue. In one passage (229c-230e), the visitor says that, when people mistakenly think they have knowledge, and need to realize they don't, it is more effective to cross-examine them (Διερωτῶσιν, 230b4) than to admonish them (νουθετητικήν, a3). When you cross-examine them and show that their claims conflict with one another, they "get angry at themselves and become calmer toward others," and "they lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves" (b9-c2). This passage is significant in several respects. For one, it may be a clue to why Plato writes so many open-ended dialogues in which Socrates refutes people.[27] More relevant here, it might give us *Socrates'* rationale for cross-examining them. If so, it reveals one of his beliefs.

But passages like these two in the *Phaedrus* and *Sophist* would not do much to help you identify Socrates' strategies, if a strategy is what you could represent with the kind of diagrams I have drawn. The *Sophist* passage, for example, would tell you little you did not already know. In cases where Socrates cross-examines someone, it would be fairly easy to see why; presumably, you could already guess what his strategy is, or at least what part of it is:



All that the comments in the *Sophist* would tell you is why Socrates adopts this particular strategy rather than another (specifically, why he cross-examines people, instead of admonishing them, in order to convince them that they lack knowledge).

More important, passages such as the ones in the *Sophist* and *Phaedrus* are applicable only to a limited range of cases. At most, the *Sophist* passage applies to cases of cross-examination, and the *Phaedrus* passage applies to cases where Socrates inches step by step from one belief to its opposite. Neither passage would account for his obscurity in the *Euthyphro*, for example, or answer questions like the five I posed above, such as why Socrates concedes to Critias in the *Charmides* and why Socrates gives Ion as many options as he does.[28] (Not to mention that it might be illegitimate to read the *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, and *Ion* through the lens of the *Phaedrus* and *Sophist* in the way you would have to in order to get the answers you wanted.)

2.4.3 *A Solution in the Phaedrus?*

I have said that certain passages in Plato's dialogues, including one in the *Phaedrus*, are intriguing but of limited use because they reveal only parts of Socrates' strategies and leave the rest unclear. You could fill in the missing parts, though, if you could reconstruct Socrates' choices; and it can seem, perhaps, that the whole of Plato's *Phaedrus* would let you do that. The idea is a bit farfetched, but I should discuss it in order to be extra thorough. I will explain, first, why the *Phaedrus* might seem to contain a solution and, next, why it turns out to be a dead end. My discussion from here may be somewhat esoteric. Nonspecialists may want to skip the rest of this section.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates discusses a *technē* of rhetoric (259e-274b). A *technē* is rigorous—it is an art, skill, or expertise, something which, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates contrasts with a mere knack (ἐμπειρία, 464a-465d; cf. *Phaedrus* 270b)—and rhetoric, he says in the *Phaedrus*, is psychagogy (ψυχαγωγία, "soul-leading"): it is a way of using words to direct the soul, not only in public but also in private, such as in the sorts of private conversations that Socrates has, presumably (261a7-9, 271c10). In that light, certain commentators have thought that Socrates here has a well-developed plan for directing other people's souls.[29] This is significant because, if he does and you pieced together what it is, you might gain insight into how he goes about choosing his strategies, insight with which you could reconstruct his choices. One scholar has even argued that Socrates tries to approximate the *technē* in the *Phaedrus* so as to lead his interlocutor (Phaedrus) to philosophy.[30] What if you took that idea a step farther and said that Socrates makes the attempt also in dialogues such as the *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, and *Ion*? If somehow you made good on that idea, could

you then identify his strategies even in the tough cases involving those other dialogues?

I doubt you could, for the same sort of reason as before: there is too much that even the *Phaedrus* leaves unclear. Note, first, a distinctive feature of the *technē*, as Socrates describes it in this dialogue. People who practice it know which kinds of discourse persuade which kinds of souls (270b-274b, 277b8-c6). Different types of souls are responsive to different types of discourse, and true rhetoricians know which type is which. They tailor their discourse to their audience in a way that ensures the right result. This, in key part, is what sets true rhetoric apart from other sorts of rhetoric on Socrates' account; it is why true rhetoricians are exact and systematic, instead of just feeling their way along as Sophists do (260e5-7, 261a4-5, 270b5-6, d9-e1). So in key part, it must be what Socrates tries to do if his aim is to approximate the rhetorical *technē*.

The problem, accordingly, is that he is vague about how it is done. The most he says about how to fit a *logos* to a soul is that one must "offer a complex soul complex discourse [ποικίλῃ … ποικίλους … λόγους] which runs the whole gamut of modes [or tones or scales—παναρμονίους], and a simple soul simple discourse [ἁπλοῦς … ἁπλῇ]" (277c2-3). To understand the tough cases I have described, you would need more from Socrates than just this. Though it might explain how he shapes his speeches in the *Phaedrus*, as a number of commentators have thought it does,[31] it scarcely accounts for his obscurity with Euthyphro, for example, his concession to Critias, or his generosity toward Ion. Certain cases involving Socrates seem not to be instances of fitting complex discourse to a complex soul or simple discourse to a simple one; or if they are, it is only in a loose and uninformative sense.

To see why, consider what it is to fashion one's discourse that way. What is a complex soul, what is a simple soul, and which kinds of discourse suit them? Part of the answer is plain enough, especially in light of certain remarks Socrates makes in the first half of the *Phaedrus*. Early in the dialogue, the question he says he asks in trying to know himself is whether he is "a beast more complicated [πολυπλοκώτερον] and savage than Typhon" (a multiform monster in Greek mythology) or, instead, "a tamer, simpler [ἁπλούστερον] animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature" (230a4-6). Here and later, too, Socrates portrays the gods as uncomplicated, in contrast to human beings. In one of his speeches, he pictures every soul, whether divine or human, as a pair of winged horses together with a charioteer who represents reason, and he says that "the gods have horses and charioteers that are themselves all good and come from good stock besides, whereas everyone else has a mixture [μέμεικται]."[32] The human soul is mixed in that one of its horses is tame and good, representing our nobler desires, whereas the other is wild and defiant, representing our baser urges

(246a-b, 253c ff.). To the extent that a human soul, in turn, is torn in different directions, it is complex, presumably—or mottled, multicolored, or variegated, as the word ποικίλος can also mean. The human soul becomes more godlike the more the charioteer brings the wild horse under control so that the two horses pull in a single direction. Socrates probably has this imagery in mind when he refers to complex souls and simple souls later in the *Phaedrus*. Most likely, he means a complex soul is one that is divided by its disparate, baser urges, whereas a simple soul is unified in being strictly obedient to reason.[33]

Accordingly, simple discourse, directed at the purely rational soul, may be discourse that is unadorned insofar as it simply provides justificatory arguments: it neither persuades nor perhaps even illustrates or clarifies by means of anything else. But there is ambiguity about this and particularly about what type of discourse is supposed to fit a *complex* soul. On one interpretation, discourse that is complex is a kind that mixes legitimate arguments with emotional appeal, just as Socrates' speeches in the *Phaedrus* do.[34] Another interpretation says the same thing but adds that complex discourse is elegant so as to appeal to people like Phaedrus who are drawn to stylish speech.[35] On still another view, complex discourse combines "the imagistic and the abstract, the playful and the serious," as one commentator puts it.[36] And on another reading, complex discourse is a type in which the speaker pretends at first to share the non-philosophical interests of the audience (for example, in Phaedrus' case, an interest in rhetoric), only to shift the audience gradually toward philosophical interests.[37] On this reading, Plato thinks everyone has a desire for truth, but he believes that in complex souls it is mixed with and lost among other sorts of desires, and the task of complex discourse is to call it forth.

Of the two types of discourse, simple and complex, the complex kind would be more important to understand if you wanted a handle on the tough cases I have named, such as the ones involving the *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, and *Ion*. Euthyphro and Ion, for example, surely have complex souls, and probably so does Critias and anyone else whom Socrates might protrepticize; probably anyone who *needs* to be protrepticized has a complex soul (and perhaps, in the *Phaedrus*, it is not even humanly possible to have a soul that is truly simple). But take, for example, the interpretations mentioned just now. How would the *Phaedrus* help you if one of these interpretations is correct? Socrates' obscurity in the *Euthyphro*, his concession in the *Charmides*, and his generosity in the *Ion* are not appeals to emotion or instances of elegant speech. They are not combinations of imagery and abstraction, or playfulness and seriousness (or, they are not *per se*, though Socrates may be playful and serious at times in the *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, and *Ion*), and in themselves they are not instances of accommodating non-philosophical interests (though Socrates acts intrigued by what Euthyphro has to say, for example, and

by Ion's occupation as a rhapsode). Plus, the idea of complex discourse might be of limited use even in cases that do meet these criteria, at least if complex discourse involves something as unspecific as, say, mixing serious arguments with emotional appeal. Suppose, for example, that you wondered why Socrates in his second speech in the *Phaedrus* calls philosophical love a form of madness (249d-253c). Madness, as he describes it, seems to be the height of unreasonableness, so what does he hope to achieve in calling the philosopher mad? If you asked this question, your discovery that his speech mixes seriousness with appeal to emotion, supposing it does, would tell you practically nothing in reply, nothing you could not discern by other means.[38] Presumably, Socrates does not play on Phaedrus' emotions in claiming that the philosopher is mad; he neither frightens Phaedrus nor evokes pity, for example. And if, then, Socrates' claim is part of a serious argument, the way to figure this out would be just to ask which argument it is part of, how forceful the argument is, and what Socrates uses it for.

So the result of all the interpretations named above is that the *Phaedrus* would not shed enough light. And it seems unlikely that any other interpretation would have a result that was much different. In the end, it is hard to think of any notion of fitting complex discourse to complex souls that would be specific enough to be illuminating, while also expansive enough to cover the full variety of ways in which Socrates might protrepticize people. Like the other parts of Plato's dialogues that I discussed before, the *Phaedrus* evidently would leave you with a lot of guesswork to do. And the more speculative your conclusions became, the less clear it would be that you had found strategies that were actually Socrates'.

2.5 Conclusion

Students of Plato who took the bottom-up approach described in this chapter would examine the Platonic dialogues closely, studying how Socrates behaves in various passages and asking why he behaves that way. In seeking an answer to that question in a range of cases, they would try to find the one interpretation of Socrates that made the most sense under the four suppositions I have named. In many instances, it would probably be too difficult to tell which interpretation that is, even in light of certain statements in Plato's dialogues that explicitly concern method. But that would be for the better, since the point of seeking a single correct interpretation would be simply to think of strategies that had been overlooked or underappreciated. The bottom-up approach would be the most sensible way to do that; it would be the best way to assemble a full range of strategies which could later be evaluated. For that reason and others, it would be an ideal counterpart to the top-down approach discussed in the previous chapter.

Notes

1. In Plato's dialogues, there are a number of passages where Socrates may be deliberately obscure, and there even are points where he himself says (sometimes ironically, perhaps) that he speaks obscurely (e.g., *Laches* 190e7–8, *Gorgias* 463e1, *Republic* 392d8, 413b4), though at times he stresses the importance of speaking clearly (e.g., *Phaedo* 115e4–6). In discussing certain obscurity in Plato's dialogues, some commentators have claimed that it is intentional on Socrates' part (e.g., Weiss 2001, 133 and Teloh 1986, 36) or Plato's (e.g., Barney 2008, 366, 371 and Waterfield 1993, 410), though none has analyzed this passage, as far as I know.
2. One might draw other examples from Liebersohn 2015, 34–37 and Weiss 2006, among other works.
3. He suggests (**part-D**) that oddness and number are like shame and fear, in the same respect in which shame and fear are like piety and justice.
4. Admittedly, there is a slight wrinkle. If, in Socrates' words (12c6), "odd is a *part* of number" in the sense that odd numbers are a subset of numbers, perhaps odd is not part of number in quite the same respect in which shame is part of fear, or piety part of justice. But in the end, it would be sensible enough for Socrates to refer to "parts" in all these cases. As Shields (2001, 146) points out in another context, the "notion of being a *portion* of something" is a primitive idea—an idea not analyzable in terms of other ideas—and is "sufficiently broad to encompass a variety of different kinds of parts, including physical components, properties, aspects, and abstract features, including limits and boundaries." Of course, ultimately Socrates and Euthyphro would need to analyze the various respects in which a whole can have parts. But Euthyphro has hardly reached the point where he is ready for that sort of analysis, and at this stage Socrates would do enough by getting him to think of *any* sorts of parts and wholes, even if in the process Socrates had him conflate the various sorts.
5. After claiming, in effect, that piety is part of justice (11e7–12a2), Socrates implies that that claim commits us to the view that fear is not part of shame (12a7-b4).
6. Nussbaum 1999, 39. See also Magee 2014, 460 and Cohen 2013, 95.
7. See reason d in §4.2 below.
8. Incidentally, I am not endorsing multiplism, as it is called—the view that a range of conflicting interpretations can all be simultaneously correct or admissible. For discussion of that view, see esp. Krausz 2002.
9. True, Critias is fairly practiced at philosophy, and Socrates knows him already; but even practiced and familiar discussants can slip up. On Critias' abilities and connection with Socrates, see 159b5–6, 165a8–b3, 166b7–c6 with Moore 2015, 64n.9.
10. And see Tuozzo 2011, 297: "Charmides is … right to doubt [176b1] whether Socrates is being quite sincere in intimating that he is utterly at a loss as to the nature of σωφροσύνη [temperance]. The finesse with which Socrates has conducted the investigation, as well as his decisiveness in rejecting any argumentative conclusion that conflicts with the principle that σωφροσύνη is beneficial, suggests that he has some understanding of what σωφροσύνη is. Furthermore, Socrates' … claim to be able to instill σωφροσύνη in others by means of the incantations he learned from his Thracian informant [155c–157c] also suggests that he may have some understanding of σωφροσύνη."

11. A number of commentators have found the arguments underwhelming, even fallacious, though some have defended them. See Jones and Sharma 2017 and Carelli 2016 and the citations therein.
12. Scholars have disagreed about whether it is. See Rudebusch and Turner 2014 and Yonezawa 2012, which contain other references.
13. For indication that he does, see esp. 197d and 200b5–6 with Emlyn-Jones 1999.
14. Cf. *Lysis* 213d, where Socrates says in narration that he wanted to give Menexenus a break. Another possibility is that Socrates is not quite in control of the conversation in the *Laches*, much as he is not quite in control of the conversation in *Republic* 2–10 if Ferrari (2010) is correct. Ferrari says that Socrates loosens his grip on his discussion with Glaucon and Adeimantus because of how unassuming they are (they don't claim to know that Thrasymachus is correct: they only act as devil's advocates in renewing his challenge; 27). And Laches and Nicias also are fairly unassuming, at least compared with someone like Euthyphro (see esp. *Laches* 187e–189b).
15. So might Plato; this might be his way to account for how poetry has merit. Some commentators have claimed it is, whereas others have thought the talk of inspiration is just a euphemism for how irrational poets and rhapsodes are. See Pappas 2012, 675 and the essays cited therein.
16. Vogt (2012, 46) thinks Socrates gives up on Ion at a certain point (viz., when Ion says he is the best general in Greece; 541b).
17. This is roughly what Trivigno (2012, 310) says Plato wants his readers to see in the *Ion*.
18. 16b4–5: ὦ παῖδες, ὥς φησιν ὑμᾶς προσαγορεύων Φίληβος. Contrast this passage with *Protagoras* 316a4-5, where Socrates refers to "Alcibiades the Beautiful" and adds: "… as you call him, *and I'm not arguing* [ὡς φὴς σὺ καὶ ἐγὼ πείθομαι]."
19. Kelsey and Lear (2019, 15) say that, for Plato, Philebus is "beyond the reach of argument," in contrast to Protarchus. Frede (1996, 219–21) calls Philebus "unreformable."
20. See Williams 1973, 144.
21. Admittedly, we may need to know something about both his beliefs and his projects in order to say much about his actions. Actions, as opposed to mere events or happenings, are intentional in that they are always identified, individuated, and explained under a description that attributes a motive, intention, or aim to the agent. E.g., we say of a batter in baseball not just "She swung a piece of wood" but "She tried to hit a homerun" or "She tried not to strike out."
22. Thanks to Jordan Kahler for this thought.
23. It also might be illegitimate to view any Platonic dialogue through the lens of another. See note 51 and the text to it in §1.3.3 above.
24. Suppose that in analyzing the *Ion*, e.g., you wondered how likely Socrates thinks it is that Ion will put two and two together after his conversation with Socrates and realize the problem with having inspiration instead of knowledge (see §2.3.4 above). If so, you would want to understand Socrates' views on what makes human beings tick, yet he says virtually nothing about human psychology in the *Ion*, and even his comments on the soul in dialogues such as the *Republic* would leave a lot unclear.
25. For more nuance, see Bryan 2014 and Scott 2011, 184ff.

26. One question is whether the rhetorical *technē* described in the *Phaedrus* deceives in this way. Yunis (2011, 187), among others, believes it does; Heath (1989, 155) is one who thinks otherwise. For a fascinating and novel approach to Socrates' comments on deception, see Moore 2013.
27. See Slings 2004, 128ff., which reflects Goldschmidt 1988 and Gaiser 1959.
28. There are similar problems involving other parts of Plato's dialogues besides the bits in the *Phaedrus* and *Sophist*. Take, e.g., Socrates' comments about midwifery in the *Theaetetus* (esp. 149a–151d, 210b–d). Though they may reveal, in part, that Socrates tries to purge people of errors and perplex them in a way that stimulates creative thought (see esp. Burnyeat 1977, 11), it is hard to see how this would help you identify his strategies in cases like the one involving the *Euthyphro*. The question in that case, e.g., would be why Socrates wants Euthyphro to think about fear—whether it is to expose the fear that Euthyphro already has, to *instill* fear, or something else instead. And if, say, Socrates tries to expose fear or instill it, it is unlikely that he does it for the sake of detecting Euthyphro's errors or perplexing him.
29. E.g., Ryle (1966, 262) thought so—or, anyway, that Plato had one. Yunis (2005) can sound similar.
30. See Moss 2012. Moss views the *technē* as a regulative ideal (as do Werner 2012, 166 and Burger 1980, 89) and says it can persuade by non-rational means (as do Irani 2017, 151–60, 174 and Rowe 1989). For certain other scholars, evidently, Socrates thinks he is too ignorant even to approximate the *technē* (see Kamtekar 2017, 10 and Hackforth 1972), and the *technē* uses purely rational means of persuasion (see Werner 2012, 171–76 and Heath 1989, 155–58). If we hold that it does, we might say that it limits its audience to people who are already devoted to serious inquiry of some sort and, thus, that it cannot help Socrates with people like Euthyphro. Raising another concern, we might say that the *Phaedrus* lets you reconstruct Socrates' strategy in the *Euthyphro*, e.g., only if Socrates has the same plan for rhetoric in the *Euthyphro* as in the *Phaedrus* and that he probably does not, because of how much later Plato wrote the *Phaedrus* than the *Euthyphro*. One possibility, though, is that Plato decided in retrospect what the plan behind Socrates' strategies must be, and the *Phaedrus* is Plato's backward-looking commentary on them which reveals what they are or even *changes* what they are; see note 51 in §1.3.3 above regarding serial fiction.
31. Besides Moss (2012), e.g., Werner (2012, 169–70) and Rowe (1986, 212–13) say the speeches are tailored to Phaedrus' complex soul.
32. 246a7–b1. If Hoinski and Polansky (2014) are correct, Socrates only makes it *appear* that gods have souls.
33. This, more or less, is what most recent commentators have held. Ferrari (1987, 277n.99) is an exception. He takes simple souls to be those of "animals who simply advance their desires," and he sees the complex soul in a human being, in whom "the charioteer … runs the full scale of voices within the soul."
34. See Rowe 1986, 213.
35. See Moss 2012.
36. Werner 2012, 169. Werner might mean just that one sort of complex speech does this.
37. When Rowe (2009, 142–44) proposes this, he emphasizes that it is speculative.
38. If Scott (2011) is correct, part of how you would find the answer is by understanding the passage about deception (*Phaedrus* 261e–262b) mentioned in §2.4.2 above. Scott thinks that philosophy is not ultimately

supposed to be a form of madness: Socrates says it is, only in the course of misleading Phaedrus in the way described in the deception passage. Moore (2015, 155–56) is much like Scott in this regard. And Erler (2018) and Morgan (2010), too, draw from other resources besides the notion of complex speech to explain Socrates' claims about madness.

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3 Would the Two Approaches Be Legitimate?

What I have said so far raises obvious questions. For one, how could approaching Plato my way be a form of genuinely studying him? More practically, how could it be appropriate in the classroom, for example, as I have suggested it would be, and how could it qualify as Plato scholarship?

There is a simple response to give. Anyone who carried out the project I have described would, in doing so, philosophize in a Platonic vein: their analysis would be rooted in Plato's texts, and they would think through issues that were plainly important to Plato. Plato clearly cared a lot about protreptic and thought seriously about it.

That response will probably be unconvincing, though. Those of us who teach Plato or write about him are part of a long and venerable tradition which we answer to. It gives teachers, typically, a firm sense of what it is to teach Plato, and scholars a firm sense of what the bounds of Plato scholarship are. To most of us, it can seem odd to suggest that my project belongs in the tradition. Our strong hunch tends to be that something makes it illegitimate. I need to address the thought that something does, and I need to address it fully.

The trick is to put my finger on what that something seems to be. Presumably, we think this project is not scholarly enough or not enough about Plato. But why? There is an obvious explanation, yet it seems unlikely on reflection. It is tempting to say the problem is that someone who studied protreptic my way would address questions about Socrates without asking what Plato meant the answers to be; for example, they would discuss whether Socrates' strategies are best without asking what Plato thought about them. This can seem to be the problem at first, yet there are Plato scholars who discuss questions about the dialogues without asking what Plato's answers are. For example, they evaluate the arguments in the dialogues while ignoring the issue of whether Plato thought they are successful. Malcolm Heath does this in a recent book, for instance. Noting that Plato never speaks in his own voice, Heath writes:

> It is … possible that Plato adopted the dialogue form precisely so that he was not committed to the fictive Socrates' conclusions … [As for whether he did] I shall proceed non-committally … For present

> purposes, the question may not matter. Philosophy is more than doxography. We are not here to catalog philosophers' opinions, but to engage with and assess their arguments, in the hope of coming to a better understanding of the issues they address. … what we should be doing if we are reading Plato philosophically is thinking about the arguments and their implications for the substantive issues.[1]

Changing direction, we could say the problem is that whereas Heath and others ignore Plato's intentions just in part, someone who took up my project would ignore Plato's intentions altogether. Heath at least asks what Plato intended the arguments to *mean*: the issue Heath ignores is just whether Plato endorsed the arguments. By contrast, someone who took my approaches would ignore not only the question of whether Plato endorsed Socrates' strategies, but also what Plato thought these strategies are (for example, what Plato thought Socrates' reason is for being abrasive rather than gentle with Euthyphro).

Yet there are Plato scholars who have ignored Plato's intentions entirely.[2] Jonathan Barnes, for example, has said he is unconcerned with what was actually in Plato's mind. For Barnes, an "interest in the mental states of dead philosophers … belongs to a biographer and not to an historian of philosophy."[3] Barnes explains that he has tried to identify not Plato's actual thoughts, but simply the thoughts that the texts express.

We could take a different tack, then: we could say the problem with my approaches is that they aren't even true to the texts. Yet there are Plato scholars who have been happy to move beyond the texts. Consider, for example, an essay that Marc Cohen and David Keyt published over 20 years ago. In it, they noted that crucial premises are missing from some of the arguments in Plato's dialogues and cannot be supplied by the arguments' context. Part of their solution was to fill in the missing premises in a way that is most charitable. They acknowledged that doing this produces arguments that are not in the text, yet they explained that their goal was not to expound Plato but simply "to construct as good an argument as possible on the foundation Plato lays"—in other words, to provide "the simplest, most elegant *supplement of* the text."[4] They said that, as commentators, they were augmenting Plato—in other words, "doing philosophy" in a way that extended Plato's thought.[5] Their aim, explicitly, was not to get the text right, but to improve on it.

So what is it that bothers us about proposals like mine? My best guess comes from something that commentators often mention when they argue that their way of interpreting Plato is legitimate: they are careful to say that they are engaging with the dialogues in the way Plato meant for us to. Heath says this, for example, as do Cohen and Keyt, and Barnes makes a similar point.[6] Maybe what bothers us, then, is that we think my project would co-opt Plato's dialogues—that it would use them differently from how he wanted or from how the texts indicate he wanted.

Regardless, I think this is what we *need* to say the problem is if we decide there is something inappropriate about this project. So that is the charge I will address in this chapter. My response to it will be unusual. I will argue that, in order to determine that someone is co-opting Plato's dialogues, we would have to know far more about Plato's intentions than we in fact know. I will contend that we are mostly in the dark about Plato's intentions—both the intentions he actually had and simply the intentions that the texts indicate he had. More specifically, we are mostly in the dark about them if what epistemologists call internalism is correct—in other words, if we don't know that some view about Plato is true unless we are able to articulate the reasons that justify that view.

Some of what I will say in this chapter is hardly novel. In fact, it may even be obvious. (For reasons that will emerge, this is vital to my case, particularly in §3.5.) Underlying my discussion at many points, though, will be a range of issues that are cumbersome. To keep this chapter readable for nonspecialists, at times I will rely heavily on notes. Most of this chapter is broadly accessible, though nonspecialists may want to skip the second to last section (§3.6).

3.1 One Theory of Interpretation

Due to the nature of Plato's writings and the nature of interpretation, there are problems for any attempt to know Plato's intentions. Predictably, though in an unexpected way, the reason involves certain theories of interpretation (all sorts of interpretation). In this section, I will summarize one of those theories—or, rather, the part of it that is most relevant here.

The theory I have chosen comes from Ronald Dworkin.[7] He was known in part as a legal theorist, so it might seem strange to discuss him in a book involving Plato. I pick his theory for two reasons. First, compared to other theories of its kind, it is especially straightforward. Second, it is the one I think is most likely to be correct, based mainly on the time I have spent interpreting Plato and trying to defend my interpretations of him against readings that differ from mine. But I will not argue that Dworkin's theory is correct, and there is no need to do so.[8] It will be enough to note that it is plausible and hard to refute and that we would need to refute it in order to know much about Plato's intentions. I will say more about this later.

Central to Dworkin's theory is the following view: whether we accept an interpretation of an object (for example, a text, a historical event, or a dream)—in other words, whether we believe it is true—depends on whether we think that, of all possible interpretations, this one comes closest to realizing the goods that an interpretation of the object should realize—that is, the goods that it should identify or bring about. Dworkin

holds that interpretation always takes place within some particular interpretive genre, a practice or tradition of interpretation that interpreters can join (for example, a practice or tradition of literary interpretation or legal interpretation). He believes that, when we interpret an object, we interpret not only the object itself, but also the interpretive genre we are in, meaning that we make decisions about what genre it is and which goods it should realize. And he thinks that our judgment about whether our interpretation is true is a judgment about whether it best realizes these goods. Take ancient philosophy scholars, for example. Often when they interpret a text, they see themselves as partnering with its author in trying to realize the philosophical or literary value of what the author has produced. Accordingly, their answer to the question "What value does the text have?" shapes their answer to the question "What does the text mean?"

I should mention that Dworkin's theory is not just about the *psychology* of interpretation. In his view, an interpretation not only *seems* true when we think it best realizes the goods it should realize, but it *is* true when it does that. And incidentally, Dworkin denies that the truth or falsity of interpretations is relative to genres of interpretation or communities of interpreters. Part of the reason is that he thinks there is a fact of the matter about which goods an interpretation should realize and whether it realizes them.[9]

Nonetheless, Dworkin's claims about the psychology of interpretation are the ones I mean to emphasize. He distinguishes between what he calls an investigation's intrinsic goal, which is to find the truth about the object of the investigation, and its justifying goals, which are the goals that we think justify our effort to find this truth; and he holds that justifying goals play a role in interpretive projects that are markedly different from the part they play in science, for example. He says that "interpreters make or just have assumptions" about which goods their interpretations should realize, and that these assumptions "are determinative of which interpretive claims they accept and which they reject."[10] He does not mean that we make these assumptions consciously; in fact, he says we generally don't. He thinks that most of us, over time, just end up with assumptions that we are unaware of and that we pick up, perhaps, from the interpretive subcultures that we belong to because of the distinctive education we have received and the time and place in which we interact with other interpreters.

As for why we so rarely articulate our assumptions and scrutinize them, Dworkin's claim is that most of these assumptions may be very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to capture in words. Take, for example, the following statement:

> The purpose of a musical performance is to recreate a musical work in a way that makes it come alive; accordingly, the good to be

> identified by an interpretation of an excellent musical performance is the extent to which it does this.

That statement may be true, but it is inadequate insofar as it fails to capture what a musical performance and an interpretation of it are supposed to do. It does not do justice to what musical performers try to do or the difficulty of their task, and it hardly provides a sufficient standard by which to judge whether they are successful. Similarly, the following statement might be true, but is inadequate for the same sorts of reasons:

> The purpose of statutory interpretation is to help some community be governed more fairly, wisely, and justly.

That statement doesn't capture the task of legal interpretation, and it leaves us without a suitable way to weigh the merits of interpretations in that genre.

In short, Dworkin implies that interpretation is even messier than it often seems. He paints a picture in which we interpreters have assumptions that are mostly hidden from view and that deeply affect our judgments about which interpretive claims are true. Here is why this matters.

3.2 What If the Theory Is Correct?

If we have assumptions that are as significant as Dworkin says, then it is hard to arbitrate among radically different interpretations of Plato. Our assumptions and those of interpreters who fundamentally disagree with us amount to rival interpretive frameworks, as they might be termed, frameworks that affect our judgments even about what counts as evidence for an interpretation and what counts as evidence against it, or at least how heavily a piece of evidence counts for or against it. If, for example, Socrates speaks for Plato in the dialogues, then the fact that Socrates argues for a certain view is strong indication that so does Plato, all things being equal. Yet if, say, Leo Strauss is right that Plato hides his intentions from most readers, providing covert signals to be detected only by interpreters who are savvy enough to spot them, the fact that Socrates argues for this view may amount to little, if any, evidence that Plato argues for it, and weaknesses in Socrates' arguments can attest that there is a lot of distance between Socrates and Plato.

Suppose, then, that Dworkin is right to suspect that we are mostly unable to unearth our assumptions so as to determine which of them are true and which are false. In that case, when one framework clashes with another, the only way to demonstrate the superiority of one reading over another is to show either that the other reading does not cohere with itself or that it conflicts with views that even its proponents have (for example, views about Plato's writings themselves or about the culture in

which they were written). In that sense, unless one of the two interpretations collapses under its own weight—that is, unless it fails by a standard internal to its own interpretive framework—neither of the two readings has an advantage over the other.[11] Picking up a term that certain Plato scholars have borrowed,[12] I will call this problem a hermeneutic circle.

The result of it is that there are many interpretations of Plato which are surprisingly hard to disprove, including interpretations that, to many people, will seem contrived or harebrained. Here are three examples of interpretations of that sort. I will use them to illustrate the point I will make in this section.

The mystical view: Plato's aim as an author is to properly condition readers to achieve unmediated cognitive access to the Forms—in other words, knowledge of the Forms that is nonrepresentational. This knowledge is nothing like justified true belief—it consists simply of oneness with the Forms—and it is not ultimately achieved through argument. Plato believes the Forms are ineffable. He does think that, in order to know them, we need to wrestle with arguments and counter-arguments. But for him, the point of the process is not to find an argument that *demonstrates* what the Forms are; rather, the point is simply to trigger a mystical vision that gives us nonrepresentational knowledge.

The arcanum view: Plato is careful with the doctrines of his that he thinks most highly of: he does not convey them in his writings (as even Leo Strauss believed he does), but communicates them only orally in one-on-one conversations with other people. His dialogues are strictly for readers who have already received the oral doctrines and need to remember what they are. Plato's aim as an author is to remind these readers by means of an elaborate code that is decipherable only for them.

The ataraxic view: Plato's dialogues are the work of a skeptic, in a classic sense of the word. Rather than trying to lead us to truth or knowledge, Plato wants us to give up our desire for it: his aim is to induce *epochē* (suspension of judgment) so that we achieve *ataraxia* (tranquility, peace of mind) the way ancient skeptics such as Sextus described.[13] (In Sextus' description, when skeptics first try to achieve *ataraxia* by gaining knowledge they discover equally strong evidence for conflicting views, and they are unable to tell which view is true. When they then suspend judgment, they by chance reach *ataraxia*; *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.25–28.)

Although these are similar to interpretations that some commentators have endorsed,[14] they are not quite the same as theirs or as defensible as theirs are (and I label these interpretations accordingly, by the way; I

deliberately give them names that few, if any, interpreters would apply to their own views). But even hypothetical interpretations are worth mentioning here. If we are to know something about Plato's intentions, we have to show that our view about them is superior to all the salient alternatives, including not only alternatives that commentators *have* endorsed but also ones they *could* endorse. (Though in a debate about Plato's intentions we do not have the *dialectical* burden of addressing all competitors of our view (or so I will suppose), we do have the *epistemic* burden of considering every competitor, or every salient one, if we want to determine that our view is *the correct* interpretation.) And the point I will make in this section is that, in case after case, if there is a hermeneutic circle, we are hard-pressed to show that our view is superior across the board.

Besides being hypothetical, the three views listed above are also about what Plato means for the dialogues to achieve, or how he means for them to affect us, whereas my main question is whether we know enough about how Plato means for us to *use* the dialogues. But it will be helpful to start with the one question before moving to the other. Below I will first illustrate the problems we face in trying to answer the one question, and then I will point to similar obstacles to answering the other question.

3.2.1 *Knowing What the Dialogues Are to Achieve*

First, consider the mystical view. Maybe the biggest strike against it is that it can seem to clash with passages such as the following, which is *Republic* 534b3–d2:

> [SOCRATES:] And do you also call that man dialectical [διαλεκτικόν] who grasps by means of *logos* the essence of each thing [τὸν λόγον ἑκάστου λαμβάνοντα τῆς οὐσίας]? And as for the man who isn't able to do so, to the extent that he isn't able to give a *logos* of a thing to himself and another, won't you deny that he has understanding [νοῦν] with respect to it?
>
> [GLAUCON:] How could I affirm that he does?
>
> [SOCRATES:] Isn't it also the same with the Good? Unless a man is able to separate out [ἀφελών] the Form of the Good [τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν] from all other things and distinguish [διορίσασθαι] it by means of a *logos*, and going through every examination as in battle [ἐν μάχῃ διὰ πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιών], eager to meet the test not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being [μὴ κατὰ δόξαν ἀλλὰ κατ᾽οὐσίαν προθυμούμενος ἐλέγχειν], he comes through all this with the *logos* not toppled [ἀπτῶτι], you will deny that such a man knows [εἰδέναι … ἔχοντα] the Good itself or any other good? And if he somehow lays hold of some phantom of it, you will say that he

> does so by opinion [δόξῃ] and not knowledge [ἐπιστήμῃ] and that taken in by dream and slumbering out his present life before waking up here he goes to Hades and falls finally asleep?
>
> [GLAUCON:] Yes, by Zeus. I shall certainly say all that.

Passages of this sort can seem to mean that we don't have knowledge, or at least knowledge of Forms, unless we can articulate what we know, provide arguments for our claims, and reply satisfactorily to every objection that can be raised.[15] This can look like a problem for the mystical view, since, if the Good is ineffable, it is hard to see how anyone can articulate what they know about it.

But proponents of the mystical view would have ways to respond. Regarding the passage quoted above, for example, they could take the following line:

> The point of passages like that one is not that knowers can define the Form of the Good, give an argument that shows their definition to be true, and answer all objections. Rather, the point is just that even in the back and forth of philosophical dialogue, knowers do no injustice to what they know.[16] Even in speaking about something ineffable, they don't fall prey to the limitations of language: they don't confuse the Good with the things that exemplify it, and they say nothing that misleads their listeners about what the Good is—in fact, they help condition their listeners to see the Good for themselves at some point. *That* is the sense in which their *logos* is unfailing (ἀπτῶτι: 534c3).

Alternatively, they could say this:

> These passages do suggest the need for justification, but they do so simply for a heuristic reason: Plato wants to ensure that we will invest ourselves fully in the argumentative back and forth of philosophical dialogue. He thinks this back and forth is an indispensable propaedeutic to mystical vision (if mystical vision is like fire, then the process of wrestling with arguments and counter-arguments is like rubbing two sticks together, in the image of *Republic* 435a1–4 and *Seventh Letter* 341c6–d2), and he realizes that we will not give ourselves over to this process unless we suspect at first that it is sufficient for gaining knowledge.

And if there is a hermeneutic circle, even maneuvers like this second one are enough to keep the mystical view intact. In fact, this second sort of maneuver would be available in case after case: about any element of the Platonic dialogues, proponents of the mystical reading could say that Plato includes it just in order to condition us to achieve mystical

vision.[17] They could say more, to be sure; for example, they could argue that certain passages in the dialogues *favor* their view, such as the part of the *Republic* where Socrates says that the Form of the Good is "beyond being" (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας: 509b8). But whenever they were backed into a corner—whenever they had to account for some part of Plato's writings that caused them trouble—they would have an easy out. True, the more they relied on it, the less *compelling* their view might become. Regardless, their view would remain a candidate for the correct interpretation.

Of course, if the mystical view is so resistant to objections, it may be unfalsifiable (or, to use a phrase with less baggage, it may not be open to the possibility of rational defeat). And if a view is unfalsifiable, perhaps we cannot know it is *true*: perhaps there cannot be enough evidence *for* a view unless there can be evidence against it. Yet the fact that it is unfalsifiable would not show that it is false. And if we cannot show that the mystical view is false, we cannot conclude that some other interpretation is superior to it.

What if, say, the mystical view is less *simple* than the other interpretation? Should we then prefer the other interpretation to the mystical view? Perhaps. But by any credible standard of simplicity, the mystical view is about as simple as an interpretation of Plato gets.[18] Above, when I first explained what the mystical view is, I gave a relatively long description in order to communicate clearly. But there is not much more the mystical view needs to say than that Plato's dialogues are propaedeutic: there are texts, readers, and an author who thinks there are Forms, and the author means to use the texts to help his readers know the Forms nonrepresentationally.

What if the mystical view has less explanatory power than its competitors? For example, what if it cannot explain exactly *how* the text is supposed to generate mystical vision? In that case, can't we say the mystical view is inferior?

I don't think so. One problem is that, if Plato's aim as an author is what the mystical view says, then there probably is a lot about his writings that will be mysterious to us until we see what he thinks he has seen. If the mystical view is correct, Plato probably thinks he himself has achieved mystical vision, a sort of mental vision which is very hard to understand before you actually have it. Until we get what Plato thinks he has, it is anyone's guess what this thing is, precisely how he intends to help us get it, and why he shapes the dialogues exactly the way he does.

3.2.2 *Knowing How We Are to Use the Dialogues*

In short, if there is a hermeneutic circle, then defending the mystical view is easy. And so is defending the other two interpretations I named, plus a wide range of their competitors. I imagine that, from what I have

said, one can readily see why.[19] And I figure it is plain enough that the result is a stalemate among a number of conflicting views about Plato's intentions, a stalemate that is firmly set: maybe there is a way to break it, but it is not clear how.[20] A consequence of it is that, at present, we know little about what Plato means for the dialogues to achieve.[21]

There are similar problems if we want to know how he means for us to *use* the dialogues. Consider, for example, the following interpretations:

> *The unitary view:* Plato intends for us to do nothing more than evaluate the arguments in the dialogues—in other words, to try to determine whether these arguments are successful.
>
> *The pluralistic view:* Plato wants us to use his writings in a variety of ways. For example, besides evaluating the arguments in the dialogues, he hopes we will analyze the drama in them, in part by asking what Socrates' strategies are with his interlocutors and whether, in real life, these strategies would be best suited to the circumstances.

The hermeneutic circle would produce a stalemate between these two views and among them and their competitors. Each side in the debate would have ways to explain the features of Plato's writings that, at first, even on its own terms, might seem to count against it. In fact, interpretations proposed in this debate would be even easier to defend than interpretations such as the mystical view.

Take, for example, the fact that the drama in Plato's dialogues is relatively short on character development: compared to other characters in the literature of Plato's day, the characters in his dialogues are rather flat—we learn little about many of them except what their beliefs are.[22] At first, this might seem to count against the pluralistic view, since we might suppose that Plato would cast his characters differently if he meant for us to understand them enough to think through how best to help them. Yet proponents of this view would still have ways to make it fit their intuitions. For example, they could take the following line: Plato develops his characters the way he does simply because of how he views human beings. For him, a person's beliefs are the most important thing about them; to paraphrase one scholar, the beliefs explain who the person is, and not the other way around.[23] So in showing us the beliefs of the fictive persons in his dialogues, Plato gives us what he sees as the key to understanding them. Thus, it still works to think he wants us to analyze his dramas.

3.3 Why Take the Theory Seriously?

If Dworkin's theory is correct, we know little about Plato's intentions. So why take the theory seriously?

The answer, frustratingly, is that we have to. Part of the reason is the obvious. The sharpest disagreements about Plato, for example, have been among interpreters from different universities, eras, and continents. This lends credibility to the idea that one's interpretations are influenced by one's history as much as Dworkin says.

Plus, Dworkin offers some nice evidence for his theory. Most notably, he says it accounts for certain phenomena of interpretation that are hard to explain. One of them is how ambivalent we often are about the nature of interpretation. On the one hand, we often hesitate to say that our interpretations are true and all others are false, end of story. Yet on the other hand, we suppose that an interpretation can be uniquely successful, and this supposition shapes the way we engage in the project of interpretation and weigh one interpretation against another. Imagine, for example, a judge who sentences a criminal to life in prison. It will seem bizarre if, in announcing the decision, the judge says: "Of course, though my interpretation of the law requires that I sentence you to life in prison, my interpretation is only one among many others, all of which are equally defensible."

Dworkin mentions other phenomena, too. For example, there is the fact that often we find an interpretation compelling, but are unable to explain why other people should accept it. In many cases, the best we can do is point to some passage or other and hope that it shifts our interlocutors' perspective. As a result, there is a familiar and distinctive sort of intractability that characterizes many disagreements about interpretation.

Dworkin offers more evidence, but I think even this short summary is enough to show that his theory is plausible. And the point I want to make is this: Since it is plausible, we need to refute it if we want to settle questions about Plato's intentions. So the problem is that theories of this sort are extraordinarily hard to refute.

It might seem that we need not refute them in order to rule out interpretations such as the mystical view, the arcanum view, and the ataraxic view. It might seem that we can rule them out on the grounds that they clash too much with the texts' face value. One could say that, when any interpretation is obviously counterintuitive and there is a viable alternative to it, the alternative should be our default interpretation. Otherwise, one might add, we could not rule out absurd interpretations which are obviously false—for example, interpretations on which Aristotle is an amoralist or Augustine and Aquinas are atheists.[24]

There are relevant differences, though, between Plato and authors like Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. For one, the latter wrote treatises—essays in which they speak in their own voice—whereas Plato wrote stories in which only the characters speak. One way to see why this is a relevant difference is to contrast claims like "Augustine is an atheist"

with claims such as the following, which a number of Shakespeare's interpreters have made:

> Rather than presenting Romeo as an exemplar of true love (as audiences often think it does), Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* indicts Romeo.[25]

The former claim is silly, whereas the latter claim is not, in part because Shakespeare wrote stories in which only the characters speak.[26]

Of course, the fact that Plato wrote stories is not decisive in itself, because some stories are different from others. Plato's stories are philosophical dialogues which may be less like Shakespeare's plays than, say, like the dialogues of George Berkeley and David Hume; and just as it is silly to think Augustine is an atheist, it is farfetched to suppose that Berkeley is a materialist, for example, or that Hume is a Christian.[27] So it can seem that there still is a way to escape the hermeneutic circle.

Nonetheless, Plato is relevantly different even from Berkeley and Hume, such that, in fact, we are stuck with the problem. To be sure, there are parallels between Plato's dialogues and Berkeley's and Hume's. (For example, in all three sets of dialogues, there is a lead character, his arguments tend to be better than his opponents', and he often silences his interlocutors or gets them to agree with him.) But here are five considerations that, together, set Plato apart, partly since they make him harder to interpret than figures like Berkeley and Hume are. The first four, especially, will be familiar to many readers already, but I should name all five explicitly, because of how contested the issue has been, and since what will matter is the combination of the five.

A Plato's dialogues are more nuanced than dialogues such as Berkeley's and Hume's.

There are at least two respects in which this is the case. First, some of Plato's dialogues seem to end inconclusively. Second, there are indications that Plato's Socrates at times makes statements that don't reflect his views. Among other reasons, his claims in some dialogues are in tension with claims he makes in other dialogues.[28] Plus, as many scholars have pointed out, sometimes when he questions his interlocutors, he may propose a claim only to elicit their assent rather than to disclose his own beliefs. At one point in the *Gorgias*, in fact, he himself even implies that questioning can work this way (466c).

Also notable is an idea in the *Phaedrus* that I mentioned in a previous chapter: the idea that, in order to be most persuasive, you must tailor your discourse to your audience (270b1–272b6, 273d8–e4, 277b8–c3). Since Socrates is the one who proposes that idea, it is natural to wonder whether he tailors *his* discourse to his interlocutors; and especially

since Socrates' proposal appears in the same dialogue where he discusses *deceptive* persuasion,[29] one question we have to ask is whether tailored discourse is intended less to communicate frankly and transparently than to have certain rhetorical effects on its audience. In the end, of course, maybe it is not; but Plato leaves us to confront this possibility, unlike authors such as Berkeley and Hume.

B There are biographical details about authors such as Berkeley and Hume that are beyond dispute and that shed light on the purpose of their dialogues. (For example, after Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* was poorly received, Berkeley recast it in the form of his dialogues.) By contrast, there is very little besides Plato's dialogues themselves that decide for us what their purpose is. Just as Plato's dialogues require interpretation, so do our other sources of information about Plato.

Apart from the dialogues, we have three main sources of information about Plato the person: anecdotes about him in the ancient biographical tradition, the *Seventh Letter*, and Aristotle, who is probably our best source. And there are challenges involving each of these.

To start with, the anecdotes are not clearly reliable.[30] At the least, it takes some work to establish that they are. For example, the report from Cicero and others that Plato visited Egypt may have been invented just as a convenient way to explain his dialogues' references to Egyptian art.

Similarly, little about the *Seventh Letter* is clear. On the one hand, although there is reason to think that Plato wrote it, there also is reason to doubt that he did.[31] Part of the task of interpreting the *Seventh Letter* is to decide whether it is his. On the other hand, even if Plato did write it, he might not be forthcoming in it. As one scholar once put it, a letter of this sort is "a public presentation and interpretation of a position, not a personal outpouring from one individual to another."[32] So if Plato is cagey in the dialogues, as he can often seem to be, he might be just as much so in the *Seventh Letter*.[33]

And there are difficulties even where Aristotle is concerned. First, for reasons that are widely recognized, Aristotle in general might not be the most reliable source of information about other people. Second, it can be unclear when, if ever, Aristotle ascribes views to Plato. One reason is that it can be hard to tell whom Aristotle refers to when he mentions "Socrates"—the historical Socrates, Plato's Socrates, Plato, or some "intermediate hybrid," in one commentator's phrase.[34] More important, even in cases where Aristotle seems to refer to Plato, it is easily imaginable that Aristotle doesn't ascribe views to him. At times—for example, in the *Metaphysics*, when Aristotle objects to Platonic Forms—he may mean to address not Plato's actual arguments, but simply "a reconstructed version" of them, in one scholar's words.[35] And in the *Politics*,

for example, when he responds to the argument for aristocracy in Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle may evaluate that argument while bracketing the question of whether Plato endorses it, much as a number of contemporary Plato scholars do, as I noted at the start of this chapter. Certain commentators have argued forcefully and at length that Aristotle carefully words many of his claims in the *Politics* in ways which suggest that he ascribes views only to Plato's Socrates.[36]

Third, there is at most a likelihood that Aristotle was privy to Plato's authorial intentions, and the more Plato's writings testify against Aristotle's interpretations of them, the more the likelihood will shrink.[37] On the one hand, Aristotle may have entered the Academy nearly 30 years after Plato wrote dialogues such as the *Republic*, in which case Aristotle may not have talked about them much with Plato.[38] On the other hand, even if Aristotle and Plato talked about them at length, there is no guarantee that Plato was candid about them. Some authors may simply believe that if they were to spill their secrets, even to a closest confidant, they would "inevitably lessen the impact of their creative work." This is how one critic put it recently in making a strong and remarkably level-headed case that even C. S. Lewis was a secretive author: for principled reasons, Lewis went to considerable lengths, perhaps even "laying a false trail," to keep under wraps a hidden theme, involving not Christology but numerology, in the Chronicles of Narnia, his tales for children.[39] That is a striking thesis. Generally, one doesn't think of C. S. Lewis or any other children's author as a sphinx. Plus, it is easy to imagine that Lewis, for all his Oxford sophistication, was not as complex a man as Plato. So if even C. S. Lewis was secretive, Plato certainly might have been.

C Even within mainstream Anglo-American scholarship today, there are respectable interpretations which imply that Plato's dialogues are substantially different from how they often look at first.

On one view, for example, Plato doesn't mean to argue us into thinking there are Forms.[40] On another view, the ideal city in the *Republic* is supposed to be the so-called city of pigs (2.372d5) rather than the aristocratic city that Socrates and his interlocutors call the "beautiful city."[41] On yet another view, the *Republic* might not make a political claim at all: its argument might be strictly about justice in the soul.[42]

These three views are fairly tame, of course, and they certainly are plausible.[43] But they do drift somewhat from how the texts often look at first. Oftentimes, at least at first, the dialogues seem to contain arguments for Forms that Plato endorses, and the *Republic* seems to have a political thesis and to endorse the aristocratic city rather than the city of pigs, mainly since Socrates and his interlocutors discuss the aristocratic city for the majority of the dialogue and only mention the city of pigs

briefly in Book 2. It is hard to imagine interpretations of Berkeley's and Hume's dialogues that could move so far past the initial look of the texts and still remain plausible.

D Though interpreters of dialogues such as Berkeley's and Hume's have disagreed, generally, just about details, Plato's interpreters have disagreed, fundamentally, about the dialogues' very purpose.

Most Anglophone scholars have supposed that Plato means to defend a certain set of claims, claims which are more or less on the surface of the dialogues. But on the margins of Anglo-American scholarship, there is some dissension from this view; and in parts of Europe, the disagreement has been profound. For example, much like Neoplatonists, some commentators in the United States have espoused interpretations that are similar to the mystical view, as I called it in the previous section, and readings like the arcanum view have had quite a few adherents particularly in Germany and Italy.[44] Further, on a view commonly ascribed to Leo Strauss, what the *Republic* teaches, ultimately, is that an ideal city is impossible—in other words, that the just city never could exist.[45] And one commentator has argued that, contrary to appearance, the *Republic* is supposed to promote democracy.[46] As another commentator puts it, "for almost any doctrine that is alleged to be platonic, one can find an interpreter who believes this specific doctrine is presented *cum grano salis*."[47]

We might insist that the only reason there has been such disagreement is that some people have had an ax to grind or, in one scholar's words, have filtered Plato through "some *a priori* hermeneutical theory."[48] We might say that when anyone first reads Plato, as long as they are free of a theory of that sort, they will see him the way most Anglophone scholars have: they will suppose that the purpose of his dialogues, at least in part, is to convince us of views he holds or to give us successful arguments for them. But evidently, that is just not true. Among other reasons, there are young adults who know nothing of hermeneutical theories or what people say about Plato and who read him for the first time and doubt that the arguments in his dialogues are supposed to be convincing or successful.[49] Sometimes they are unsure what other purpose the arguments have, but they suspect that Plato has some clever tactic hidden up his sleeve.

E Where Plato is concerned, it is particularly plausible to think that our assumptions determine our interpretive judgments the way Dworkin describes.

In the next section, I will offer an example of a case where Dworkin can seem correct about our assumptions.

3.4 One Interpretation of Plato

My example involves an interpretation of Plato that one Anglophone commentator, Sandra Peterson, has recently offered. Let me first describe part of her interpretation, and then I will explain what its significance is here.

3.4.1 *Part of the Interpretation*

Peterson addresses an apparent disparity in Plato's writings: the fact that Socrates is inquisitive and avowedly ignorant in dialogues such as the *Apology* and *Euthyphro*, but is dogmatic in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic*—or, anyway, he often *seems* dogmatic there. This feature of Plato's dialogues is puzzling, and scholars have tried to make sense of it. The most common thought, which I have mentioned, is that Socrates is indeed different in the second set of dialogues and that the reason is that Plato wrote them later than he wrote the others and at a point when his thoughts had changed. In other words, the most popular strategy, associated with developmentalism, as it is called, has been to affirm that there is a disparity and then to try to account for it. Peterson takes a different tack. She argues that the disparity is only apparent: the Socrates in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic* is the same inquisitive gadfly who appears in dialogues such as the *Apology* and *Euthyphro*.

Here is an example of how she elaborates on that thesis. She contends that in the *Republic*, when Socrates presents an aristocratic city and proposes that it is just, he does this simply in the course of examining his interlocutors. Peterson says there are two phases of Socratic examination—a phase in which Socrates first exposes his interlocutors' beliefs, and a phase in which he then scrutinizes his interlocutors in light of those beliefs—and the first phase takes different forms depending on who the interlocutors are. With some interlocutors, Socrates needs to ask questions; with other interlocutors, such as those in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, Socrates must give lectures. But even his lectures are designed just to reveal what his interlocutors believe. In the *Republic*, for example, he presents his thesis about the just city simply to have his interlocutors affirm it so that he then can scrutinize them. Dialogues such as the *Republic* show only the first phase of Socratic examination; hence, they can look dogmatic. Yet once the first phase is complete, Socrates will begin the second phase if he has the chance.

Peterson concludes that we have no reason to think that Plato holds many of the views that are often ascribed to him, such as the view that the aristocratic city described in the *Republic* is the ideal city, the view that there are Forms, and the view that the soul is immortal. In fact, she holds that we have reason to *deny* that Plato holds such views. Here is

how she explains her rationale for the latter claim with respect to the aristocratic view in the *Republic*:

> Plato leaves readers free to believe, as I in fact do, that Socrates, as depicted in the *Republic*, is as capable as the Socrates of any other dialogue would be of revealing absurdity, if there is any, in [the aristocratic] city. He is certainly as capable as we are. Comparing our own capacities with the depicted Socrates', we have a test for what the depicted Socrates *would* reject if he *were* in [the second phase of his examination]. Our test is that *if we can see an absurdity, he certainly could* [emphasis added]. So though we cannot say that Socrates *does* reject much of what he proposes, we can reasonably estimate what he *would* reject if he were in [the second phase of his examination].[50]

Peterson believes we can use our own scruples as a guide to what Socrates' scruples would be. And for her, Socrates' scruples are basically Plato's. (She assumes that Socrates speaks for Plato.)[51] So, for example, from the fact that the aristocratic thesis in the *Republic* seems absurd to modern readers, she concludes that Socrates would reject it and, by implication, that Plato does. On her view, the arguments in the dialogues are meant just to generate reflection by giving us puzzles to work through and by exposing hidden beliefs we live by.

3.4.2 *Whose Plato Is More Valuable?*

Suppose we are to choose between Peterson's interpretation and the developmentalist alternative I mentioned just now. (There are other options, of course, even for developmentalists, but consider these two.) Quite plausibly, as Dworkin implies, our decision will depend on how we answer the following question: Which Plato is more valuable than the other, the one Peterson gives us or the developmentalist Plato?

The reason is that there is little other basis, if any, on which to favor one of the two interpretations over the other. Peterson's interpretation, for example, is as simple as can be, by any viable standard of simplicity. Further, her interpretation has plenty of explanatory power. For example, she can account for the elaborateness, intricacy, and lengthiness of many of the arguments in the dialogues,[52] since in order to expose our hidden beliefs or entangle us in solving puzzles, the arguments need to be developed enough to appeal to us and to resist easy refutation. Similarly, she can account for how often readers have suspected that the arguments are supposed to be successful, since creating that suspicion is a helpful way for Plato to make us take the arguments seriously and grapple with them, so that they then can expose our hidden beliefs or present us with puzzles. In other ways, too, it would make sense for Plato to gear the

dialogues so that his aims and views are difficult or even impossible to decipher—for example, it would make sense if he thinks that what matters about what is said in philosophical discussion "is not who said it, but whether it is true" (*Charmides* 161c5–6; cf. *Phaedrus* 275b–c).

The sticking point for most people, probably, will be Peterson's idea that the arguments Socrates voices are not supposed to be successful—that neither Plato nor even Socrates endorses them in the end.[53] That idea can seem to ignore the texts' face value. Hence, it can look as if our presumption should be against Peterson's reading—or, as if the developmentalists' reading should be our default interpretation if the choice is between their reading and hers.

First, though, consider the way Peterson reaches her conclusion and how similar it is to the way the developmentalists reach theirs. Here, as elsewhere, I should start by stating the obvious. When we interpret a text, we often have conflicting suspicions and want a way to accommodate all of them. Sometimes we are able to, but when we are unable, we pick which of them to jettison; and the Platonic dialogues let us jettison a lot more than dialogues such as Berkeley's and Hume's do. When certain scholars, for example, have had the following suspicions simultaneously, as they presumably have:

- The arguments for Forms in Plato's dialogues are supposed to be successful.
- The weakness of these arguments is easy enough for Plato to see.
- It is misguided to try to *argue* someone into believing there are Forms.

—they have abandoned the first of the three, even though, arguably, it comes from taking the texts at face value. And when certain other commentators have had the following suspicions simultaneously:

- The city of pigs in the *Republic* is supposed to be the best city, since Socrates calls it the "true" and "healthy" city (372e6–7).
- Plato would not devote so much of the text to the discussion of the aristocratic city if he did not think it is the best city.

—they have abandoned the latter, even though, arguably, it also comes from taking the texts at face value.[54]

Presumably, Peterson and the developmentalists have started with the same suspicions, both of which, arguably, come from taking the texts at face value:

- Whereas the Socrates in dialogues like the *Apology* is inquisitive and avowedly ignorant, the Socrates in dialogues such as the *Republic* is dogmatic.
- Plato meant for his various portrayals of Socrates to mesh with one another (the historical Socrates, the fictional character, or both).

Peterson simply has jettisoned the first of these two suspicions, whereas the developmentalists have jettisoned the second one. Not only Peterson, then, but also the developmentalists depart from how the texts can look at first.

So if we want to conclude that Peterson is less true to how the texts look, we need to say that the first of those two suspicions should count for more than the second one. And maybe it should. Regardless, the reason to think it should, ultimately, is just that the first suspicion is stronger for many people than the second one is. Thus, the reason has to do with the depth of an impression, as does the reason for the opposing view, ultimately. And impressions, of course, can be more than anything else the result of the people who have them. So it is particularly plausible to think that our judgments in this case are due to our inclinations.

3.4.3 *Choosing between Platos*

It also is pretty plausible to think that our inclinations are due to the sorts of assumptions Dworkin describes. On the one hand, we probably ask on some level which Plato is more valuable—the Plato we get when we favor the first of the two suspicions, or the Plato who emerges when we favor the second. And on the other hand, the reasons for our answer are likely to be nebulous—understandably, since it is far from clear what the correct answer is; in other words, the issue hardly decides itself for us.

As a brief illustration, imagine an exchange between Peterson and the developmentalists she opposes. In arguing that Peterson's Plato is less valuable than theirs, the developmentalists could complain that her Plato scarcely even does philosophy, since the arguments in his dialogues are not ones he accepts, and that "a Plato who merely played around with notions and arguments is a Plato corrupted," as one commentator once put it, "a Plato unworthy of serious study."[55] In response, though, Peterson could say that her Plato doesn't just play around with arguments; rather, he uses them in a savvy way to draw people into philosophy.

The rebuttal could be that a superior Plato is one who doesn't just draw us into philosophy but makes significant contributions to it. But Peterson could charge that the contributions of the developmentalist Plato are no more significant than her Plato's are. After all, she could argue, if Plato is who the developmentalists think, then Jonathan Barnes is basically right: "Plato's philosophical views are mostly false, and for the most part they are evidently false; his arguments are mostly bad, and for the most part they are evidently bad."[56] The developmentalists could retort that, even if their Plato's arguments are weak, his ambitions are inspiring. But Peterson could reply that, in that case, Plato is valuable for the extent to which he spurs us onward in philosophy and that this, after all, is what makes *her* Plato valuable.

The exchange thus far would be inconclusive, and most likely, if it didn't stall there, it would just continue in the same way. The choice would be between a Plato who is levelheaded and cunningly protreptic, but not much else (Peterson's Plato) and a Plato who has views that are lively and colorful, but outlandish and scarcely defensible (the developmentalists' Plato), and there would be little to decide between them except the tendencies we already had. Of course, *ethicists* could reason through the question of which sort of character is more admirable—the sort that Peterson sees in Plato, or the sort the developmentalists imagine. But although interpreters of Plato can double as ethicists, that is not what interpreters are per se. Besides, at issue would be more than just which sort of character is more admirable. The question would be which goods an interpretation of Plato should realize, and that question is not reducible to the other. My discussion in Chapter 4 will indicate part of the reason. Perhaps rather than giving us a Plato to admire, for example, an interpretation should produce a Plato who challenges us or whose flaws are instructive.[57] Some scholars have thought so. One, for example, objected to the reading mentioned above on which the *Republic* is the work of a commendable democrat. In his view, Plato is more valuable as a shocking aristocrat. ("You may consider Plato's city totalitarian madness," this scholar wrote, "but you will not soon forget it.")[58] Whether views like that one are correct is a difficult issue, and it is not one that ethicists have dealt with or perhaps even could, given how much it requires an intimate knowledge of the nature of interpreting Plato. It also is not one that Plato scholars have addressed fully or perhaps even could, given how much of the task of interpreting Plato is hard to capture in words.

3.4.4 *More Evidence in Peterson's Favor*

I should say more than I have said so far. My comments to this point have hinged on the thought that Peterson's interpretation is plausible, and many students of Plato are prone to doubt that it is. In fact, one scholar describes part of it as "extraordinarily implausible."[59] Another says the whole project behind it is "profoundly misconceived."[60] It can look as if Peterson just *has* to be wrong, in which case it may be hard to take my comments seriously.

So in the following, I will underscore how much evidence there is in Peterson's favor. Certain critics have raised doubts about one of her central claims that I mentioned: the claim that, if an argument in the dialogues looks weak to us, we can safely infer that it looks weak to Socrates, too, and, in turn, that it looks weak to Plato. Sensibly enough, critics have objected that our judgments might be different from Socrates' and Plato's.[61] But there is additional reason, besides the reason Peterson provides, to think that Plato sees weaknesses in many of the arguments in the dialogues, including arguments that Socrates can seem to endorse.

As an example, I will point to evidence that Plato sees weaknesses in the aristocratic argument in the *Republic*, meaning the argument for the view that the aristocratic city described in that dialogue is the just city. It will be enough to offer only an example. Since the whole Platonic corpus might reflect a cohesive authorial plan, it matters a lot whether the aristocratic argument has the hidden function that Peterson names. If Plato is so underhanded even in presenting *that* argument, there is a good chance that he is underhanded throughout his writings, because of how clear it can seem at first that he endorses that argument.

My example will take up the rest of this chapter (§3.5–3.6). To keep from begging the question, I will talk at first as if *Socrates* endorses the arguments he proposes in the *Republic*.

3.5 Plato and the Aristocratic Argument

The aristocratic city described in the *Republic* is a hypothetical city, as opposed to a city that exists. But in the *Republic*, Socrates and his interlocutors argue that this city is practicable, meaning, roughly, that it *could* exist.[62] I will contend that their argument for that claim is essential to their argument that the city is just. In other words, I will maintain that the first argument has to succeed in order for the second argument to succeed: Socrates and his interlocutors have to show that the city is practicable in order to show that it is just.[63]

I will explain why in the next section. In this section, I will discuss the implication. I will argue that if indeed Socrates and his interlocutors need to show that the aristocratic city is practicable and if Plato is aware of this, there is a deficit in the aristocratic argument, and there is reason to think Plato is aware of the deficit. In my view, the evidence is not strong enough to show that he *was* aware, but it is strong enough to give Peterson's interpretation some real teeth.

3.5.1 *Exiling the Elders*

Certain features of the aristocratic city can seem impracticable right away. Take, especially, a passage that appears at the end of *Republic* 7. There Socrates and his interlocutors agree that philosophers will make a radical change when they first come to power:

> Everyone in the city who happens to be over ten years old they will send into the country [εἰς τοὺς ἀργούς]; and taking over their children, they will rear them—far away from those dispositions they now have from their parents—in their own manners and laws that are such as we described before. (540e4–541a5)

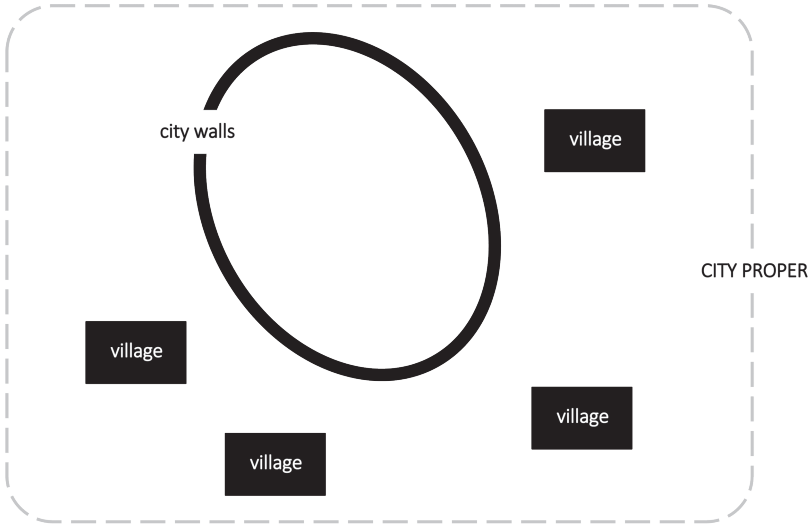
Socrates and his interlocutors can seem to mean that the non-philosophical elders would have to leave the city altogether, and a difficult question is how the philosophers could get them to do this. It can seem that the elders would have to be driven out by force, and it is hard to think the philosophers would have enough military power to drive them out, in part since there might be only a handful of these philosophers.[64] Philosophic natures are few and far between (491a8–b2, 495b2, 503b6–8), and in unjust cities only some of them escape corruption and become full-fledged philosophers (490e1–495c2, esp. 490e1–2).

There is a way to solve the problem posed by the Book 7 passage. First, we can take the *Republic*'s criterion for practicability to be relatively lenient. The *Republic* lets us do this, because of how vague and loose it leaves its notion of practicability. Though, as a minimum, 'practicable' in the *Republic* does not mean simply "conceivable" (or, "logically possible"), neither does it mean, for example, "likely" or "probable" (see 502c6–7, 540d2–3). We can suppose that something is practicable if and only if it is allowed by a certain set of constraints which, for lack of a better term, I will call the constraints of nature.[65] We can think of them as all the constraints a person is under just by virtue of being human instead of, say, being (purely) divine. These constraints include physical constraints such as gravity and basic psychological constraints such as appetitiveness. So, for example, if a city must be allowed by the constraints of nature in order to be practicable, then a city in which people defy gravity by flying like superheroes is impracticable, though a god might be able to fly.[66] Of course, besides the constraints of nature, there are other constraints that affect what can exist. For example, there are constraints which are contingent on particular human societies, such as the inertia that would have kept fifth-century Athens from outlawing sports or a woman from becoming President in the 1950s United States. But we can suppose that the constraints of nature *per se* are all that determine whether something is practicable in Socrates and his interlocutors' sense. If they are, then to claim that a city is practicable in that sense is to speak "from a standpoint of both temporal and geographical neutrality,"[67] in one commentator's phrase: it is to say not that the city *is* attainable for some particular human society (fifth-century Athens, for example), but simply that this city *could* come to be *some*where *some*time. And when Socrates and his interlocutors claim that they have identified a practicable city, they do not imply that they have a blueprint for political reform. In fact, it would be consistent for them to say both that their city is practicable and that the contingent makeup of every human society in the foreseeable future will keep this city from coming to be.

Once we construe practicability this way, it is relatively easy to show that something is practicable, and then explaining the Book 7 passage is manageable.[68] In Plato's day, as strange as it seems, it may have been easy enough to imagine how, instead of being forced out, the elders could

simply be persuaded to leave, even if, in leaving, they would have to part with their children. The arrangement described by Socrates and his interlocutors, perhaps, is not unlike the Spartan *agōgē* (public upbringing) insofar as the *agōgē* distanced boys from their parents.[69] Even nowadays, for that matter, parents sometimes abnegate their children in the service of some greater good. Modern parents leave their children at boarding school, for example, send them to live and train with Olympic coaches, and give them up for adoption. People will make all sorts of sacrifices as long as they are convinced of the worth of what they are sacrificing for. And by the time the philosophers came to power, the elders would be convinced of the worth of the new regime. They would already have been persuaded that philosophical rule is in the city's best interest (474b–502a); they would be primed to follow the philosophers' commands and, in turn, to make sacrifices for the good of the city in case after case.

To solve the problem posed by the Book 7 passage, we can say that expelling the elders seems impracticable only when we suppose that they would be asked to leave the city altogether. To be sure, if that is what they would be asked to do, then expelling them may indeed be impracticable, since it is one thing to sacrifice your children for your own city-state, and another thing to sacrifice your children for someone else's. But we need not suppose that the elders would have to cut ties with the city. In Plato's day, there was such a thing as synoecism (συνοικισμός): communities that were physically separate from one another could be combined so that they were all part of the same city-state. This kind of arrangement may be what Socrates and his interlocutors have in mind. Perhaps all that the philosophers would ask of the elders is that they live in villages (κώμαι) surrounding the city walls.[70]



The elders might still be part of the city, only at a remove from the children. If so, Socrates and his interlocutors' claim at the end of Book 7 is less problematic than it can seem.

3.5.2 *Persuading the Masses*

However, once we take the option I just proposed, we have to hold that the founders of the city (and perhaps also the philosopher-rulers themselves) would be not just persuasive, but *exceedingly* persuasive in convincing the masses that philosophers should rule. So what can we imagine they would tell them in order to convince them so thoroughly?

The *Republic* points to at least three reasons for saying that philosophers should rule:

The epistemic reason: Philosopher-rulers would know the Form of the Good.[71]

The motivational reason: Only philosophers would seek the good of the whole city when they ruled. Rulers who were "lovers of ruling" (521b4) would not seek the good of the whole city, but would pursue political office simply for their own benefit, and would thus engender civic strife. Only philosophers would have a life they preferred so strongly to the political life that they would look down on the political life (520e–521b).

The consensus reason: The question of who should rule tends to lead to bitter, intractable, and destabilizing conflicts between social and economic elites and the masses. Rule by philosophers could forestall such controversy.[72]

But because of how persuasive the founders would have to be, reasons such as these latter two would not be compelling enough to the masses, given how low their estimation of philosophers tends to be. Though the latter two reasons might *accompany* other reasons, they would be inadequate by themselves.

To be sure, Socrates argues that one could improve the masses' view of philosophers by distinguishing true philosophers from imposters. In part of Books 5 and 6 (474c–502c), he distinguishes among the following three groups of people:

Certain non-philosophers: These people are naturally philosophic but are corrupted by non-philosophic souls. Apparently, they end up neither philosophizing nor even pretending to philosophize (see 489e–495b).

Ersatz philosophers: These people keep company with philosophy, and the mob associates them with philosophy (489d, 491a, 495c, 500b). But they have "defective natures" (495d7) and only

mimic philosophizing (491a, 495c). Accordingly, they disgrace philosophy (495c) and produce nothing more than "sophisms" (496a8).

True philosophers: These people are naturally philosophic, and in spite of the mob they turn to philosophy and do the good (489e–495c).

And Socrates claims that whereas the masses view the ersatz philosophers as wholly vicious, the masses think the true philosophers are harmless.

But Socrates also acknowledges that the masses see the true philosophers as "useless."[73] Given that they do, it would not be enough to offer them, say, the motivational reason to accept the rule of philosophers: even if the masses thought that the true philosophers have good motives, the masses would need to be convinced that the true philosophers would make smart decisions once they were in power. Presumably, then, the founders would have to offer the epistemic reason to accept philosophers' rule, as Plato probably realizes. And presumably, the founders would have to convince the masses not just that philosophers would have a *chance* of knowing the Form of the Good, but that it is a sure thing that they would know it. This is where the trouble arises.

3.5.3 *Knowing the Good*

The problem is that, on the one hand, it is fairly easy to think of obstacles that might keep human beings from knowing the Good—obstacles that might thwart them even if they received a proper education, as Socrates and his interlocutors argue at length one could (376c–427c, 502d–541b). Plato probably realizes this, too, and sees that it can easily occur to his readers. One such obstacle is the very nature of knowing the Good. Suppose, for example, that to know the Good is to know all the other Forms, as one common interpretation says.[74] In that case, if there are Forms of Justice, Courage, Beauty, and so forth, the difficulty of knowing the Good is the difficulty of knowing Justice, compounded by the difficulty of knowing Courage, compounded by the difficulty of knowing Beauty, and so on, plus some added difficulty, perhaps. And Forms such as Justice, Courage, and Beauty are themselves hard to know. There are other obstacles also. Perhaps, for example, a human being can know Forms only through recollection, if at all;[75] and perhaps only sensible particulars can trigger recollection of Forms, and sensible particulars can remind us of the Form of *F*-ness only if they are or appear *F*,[76] yet each sensible particular has contrary predicates and, as a result, is too different from Forms to recollect them to us.[77] This is a genuine possibility. It does seem that, in working off of sensible particulars that are both

F and not-*F*, we might always struggle to isolate their *F*-ness enough to determine what the Form of *F*-ness consists of.[78]

On the other hand, it is difficult to show that the obstacles to knowing the Good are surmountable, as Plato likely sees. The only way to show it may be to demonstrate that some human being already knows the Good.[79] Of course, in arguing for the practicability of various *other* things besides knowing the Good, it may work to rely on induction the way Socrates and his interlocutors often do in the *Republic*. Consider, for example, how they conclude that people could be persuaded to accept the practice of having female guardians exercise naked with male guardians. In effect, Socrates and his interlocutors argue the following:

- People could be persuaded that this practice is best (456c12–457a5).
- When people in the past were persuaded that it is best for *men* to exercise naked, people came to accept *that* practice (452c6–e2).

That style of reasoning infers practicability from actuality in a certain respect: from the proposition "*X* is actual and is relevantly similar to *Y*," it infers "*Y* is practicable," or it makes a series of inferences like that one. This kind of analogical inference helps with the sorts of questions that Socrates and his interlocutors address, because there are analogs (*X*) in everyday life that are similar enough to the things that Socrates and his interlocutors try to show are practicable (*Y*), such as having both male and female guardians. But we face an unusually challenging task when we confront the question of whether the Good could be humanly known. It is hard to find an adequate analog to knowing the Good, since knowing the Good may be fundamentally different from anything we have encountered.

The upshot is that it would be difficult for the city's founders to be persuasive enough—persuasive enough to convince the masses fully that philosopher-rulers would know the Form of the Good. This is significant because Plato's ancient readers could realize it, and Plato could realize that they could realize it. Of course, when he wrote the *Republic* maybe he figured that readers just wouldn't ask the question of whether the Good is humanly knowable. But it is likely that he imagined they would. At the least, he could imagine that *some* readers might, and that once they voiced their concern, doubt could spread. Among other reasons, the question is fairly obvious. Plus, in Greece at the point when Plato probably wrote the *Republic*, a certain religious view said that the most valuable kind of knowledge is out of reach for human beings because only gods can have it, and human beings cannot become gods. This was a traditional religious view, and many Greeks still held to it. At the same time, other Greeks, more and more, were rejecting this view in favor of new religious views. The question of whether the traditional view is correct was a live question at the time, and it got a lot of attention.[80]

Plato was aware of this, presumably. In fact, though Socrates rejects the traditional view in the *Republic*, he can seem to accept it elsewhere, in certain dialogues that Plato is thought to have written before the *Republic* or around the time when he wrote the *Republic*.[81] There is a passage in the *Phaedrus*, for example, where Socrates says that "the epithet 'wise' … befits god alone" and that "the name 'philosopher' or something of the sort would be more fitting and seemly [for a human being]."[82] At the least, that passage is suggestive of the traditional view: it brings it to mind. So does the claim in the *Apology* that "human wisdom [σοφία] is worth little or nothing" (23a6–7)—that the "wisest" human being is the one who sees "that his wisdom is worthless."[83] And those passages in the *Phaedrus* and *Apology* can seem to reflect a lot else in Plato's dialogues.[84] If you were an inquisitive ancient Greek and you compared these passages to the *Republic* in a culture where the traditional religious view was in question, you might wonder what Plato was up to. You might wonder why in the *Republic* Socrates rejects the view and, in turn, what evidence he has that it is false. And if, for example, you suspected that Plato used to hold the traditional view and now had changed his mind, you might be especially curious what the evidence is supposed to be.[85]

Moreover, consider the *Phaedo*, another dialogue that Plato is thought to have written before he wrote the *Republic*. In the *Phaedo*, too, Socrates suggests that knowledge of the most valuable kind is out of reach for human beings, but in this case, his reason involves something other than the religious view I have mentioned. In the *Phaedo*, he is focused on the body. He has various concerns about it; in part, he says that it distracts us from doing philosophy and keeps us from doing it properly. But he also implies that, even if we philosophize as well as human beings can, we still will be unable to get knowledge or, at least, the best sort of knowledge, because of a certain obstacle (ἐμπόδιον: 65a10) that sensory perception poses.[86] In a speech that he imagines, the "true philosophers" (66b2) start by saying that the body sidetracks us, but they also add:

> Worst of all, if we do get some respite from [the distractions caused by the body] and turn to some investigation, everywhere in our investigations the body is present and makes for confusion and fear, so that it prevents us from seeing the truth [καθορᾶν τἀληθές]. It really has been shown to us that, if we are ever to know anything purely [καθαρῶς τι εἴσεσθαι], we must escape from the body and view things in themselves with the soul by itself [ἀπαλλακτέον αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ θεατέον αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα]. It seems likely that we will attain that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers—namely, wisdom [φρονήσεως]—only when we are dead [ἐπειδὰν τελευτήσωμεν], as our argument shows, and not while we live [ζῶσιν]; for if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge

> [καθαρῶς γνῶναι] with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death [ἢ οὐδαμοῦ ἔστιν κτήσασθαι τὸ εἰδέναι ἢ τελευτήσασιν]. Then, and not before, the soul is by itself apart from the body. (66d3–67a1)

Here Socrates can seem deeply pessimistic, and at the least it is not immediately clear why he is wrong or just exaggerating. He can seem pessimistic enough that, in reading the *Republic*, you might wonder why you are supposed to be *optimistic*. In other words, you might wonder why Socrates is *right* in the *Republic*, such that he is *wrong* in the *Phaedo*, about whether the obstacle mentioned here in the *Phaedo* is surmountable. Of course, you might think that Plato had simply changed his view about it. But if so, you would probably be curious *why* his view had shifted. And as you looked for an answer, it would be even easier to think of obstacles to knowing the Good.[87]

Let me sum up my point in this section. When Plato writes the *Republic*, he likely imagines the following three things about his readers: first, that they may ask whether the Good is humanly knowable; second, that they can easily think of reasons to doubt that it is; and third, that they can realize that if *they* have doubts, so might the masses when the founders of the aristocratic city tried to convince them that philosopher-rulers would know the Good. Yet unless the founders could convince them fully, it is doubtful that the city is practicable, and Plato probably sees this, too, and figures that it is easy enough for readers to notice. Suppose, then, that Socrates and his interlocutors have to show that the city is practicable in order to show that it is the just city, as I will argue in the next section. And suppose there is reason to think Plato is aware of this, as I will also contend. In that case, there is a deficit in their argument for the city's justice, and there is reason to think Plato is aware of this deficit.

The implication, to be sure, is not that Plato rejects the aristocratic argument. The evidence that he does—Peterson's evidence combined with mine—is far from decisive. But although Plato thus might still accept the aristocratic argument, it is at least as likely that he rejects it. And if he rejects even this argument, there is a good chance that he rejects many other arguments in the dialogues which, like this one, can seem quintessentially Platonic. So the implication is that Peterson's reading holds its own against competitors like the developmentalist interpretation that Peterson names. In fact, the texts underdetermine which of those two interpretations is superior to the other.[88]

3.6 The Practicability Requirement

My argument pivots on the claim that Socrates and his interlocutors have to show that the aristocratic city is practicable in order to show that it

is just. So why think they have to? Here, in brief, is my answer. Socrates and his interlocutors assume that there is a practicability requirement, as I will call it: they proceed as if a city has to be practicable in order to be just, such that the just city is simply the best practicable city—the city that, of all *practicable* cities, is best. This assumption shapes both the way they search for the just city and the reason they ultimately give for thinking that the just city is the aristocratic city: the way they search for the just city is by trying to identify the best practicable city; and ultimately, their reason for calling the aristocratic city the just city is that it is the best practicable city. Consequently, they need to be *right* to assume the practicability requirement, if they are to have a good enough chance of drawing the correct conclusion about what the just city is. And if their assumption is correct, there is a further consequence: in order to *demonstrate* that they are correct about what the just city is, they need to show that the aristocratic city is the best practicable city, the best of all cities that are practicable.[89] In that case, they need to show that the aristocratic city is indeed practicable.

That, anyway, is my explanation. What I need to do now is defend it. More specifically, I need to argue for two of the claims I just made: first, that Socrates and his interlocutors assume the practicability requirement; and second, that their assumption needs to be correct. Generally, scholars have been amenable to the idea that Socrates and his interlocutors assume the practicability requirement during the earliest phase of the *Republic*'s political discussion (2.369c–5.472b). The main issue is whether the practicability requirement remains in effect through the end of the dialogue. Some commentators say it is cancelled at a certain point in Book 5 (472b3–473b3) and never reinstated in the rest of the *Republic*.[90] I will respond to that claim below, but will first offer evidence that the practicability requirement is in place *before* the passage in Book 5. Throughout this section, I will discuss the text in some detail. Nonspecialists may want to skip ahead.

As I have suggested, the question of what, exactly, the notion of practicability is in the *Republic* is complicated. Fortunately, I can leave that question mostly open. I will suppose simply that to say something is practicable is to imply, at the minimum,[91] that it is allowed by the constraints of nature, as I have called them—in other words, that it is to imply not that it is doable anytime soon, but simply that it could be feasible for *some* human beings somewhere sometime.

3.6.1 *Practicability Before the Book 5 Passage*

In Book 4, Socrates and Glaucon conclude that the aristocratic city is just. The reason they give is that the city is "completely good" (τελέως ἀγαθήν: 427e7; see e6–11); and through the end of the dialogue, this continues to be their reason for calling the city just.

Now, the phrase τελέως ἀγαθήν ("completely good") may not convey exactly what Socrates and his interlocutors mean. In many respects, as they discuss practicability their language shifts from time to time, making it hard to see quite what their claims are. At times, for example, they talk as if a city has to be practicable not only in order to be just, but even simply to be best, though at other times they suggest something different, as some of my quotations below will attest. And they vary among saying that the city is *completely good*, that it is *correct*, and that it is *best*.[92]

Little, if anything, hangs on precisely what their claim is, though. The important point is that, even before the Book 5 passage, they *treat* the just city as the best practicable city. So let me offer evidence that they do. In the process, I will need to recount some of the other parts of the *Republic* that lead to the passage in Book 5.

In Book 4, when Socrates and his interlocutors infer that the aristocratic city is just, they infer also that it is wise, courageous, and temperate. As the conversation progresses, they come to an agreement about what the city's wisdom (428a–429a), courage (429a–430c), and temperance (430c–432b) are. And they go on to give an account on which the soul is tripartite (435e–441c), justice is an arrangement in which each part functions properly, doing strictly its own work in accordance with nature (441c–444d), and virtue is a sort of health (444d–e).

Once that account is complete (at the end of Book 4), Socrates is ready to move ahead with the discussion. But his interlocutors interrupt him with a concern at the start of Book 5. In articulating their concern, all they say is that Socrates has not argued adequately that the aristocratic city is just. And in conceding, all he says at first is that it is difficult to fill out the argument fully enough (450c6–7). But then, as if to explain why he is conceding, he highlights the question of whether the aristocratic city is practicable, and he talks as if there is a significant problem if it is not:

> For one might doubt that the things we proposed are practicable [δυνατά]. And *even if* [εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα] one grants that in the best practicable conditions they could come to be [γένοιτο], one might still doubt that they would be best [ἄριστ']. So that's why there is a certain hesitation about [trying to offer a fuller argument], for fear that the argument might seem to be a prayer [εὐχή], my dear friend (450c8–d2).

Effectively, the first part of this passage has the following form:

> One might doubt that *p*. And even if one grants that *p*, one might still doubt that *q*.[93]

This is notable partly since statements in that form can imply that *p* is a necessary condition of *q*. (For example, imagine the statement "One might doubt that Colonel Mustard was even in town at the time of Mrs. Peacock's murder; and even if one grants that he *was* in town, one might still doubt that he is the murderer.") Of course, not all such statements have this implication; a lot depends on context. But in what follows, I will indicate that the context of Socrates' statement is right for Socrates to suggest that a city has to be practicable in order to be just.

Shortly after Socrates makes the statement I just quoted, he agrees to "go back again and say what perhaps should have been said then in its turn" (451b8–c1; cf. 502d5–e1). And he makes three main proposals (referred to as waves). In discussing the first proposal, which is that both men and women be guardians in the city (451d–452a), Socrates and his interlocutors conclude, first, that this is practicable (453b–456c) and, second, that it is best (456c–457b; cf. 452e3–453a6, 456c5–11). Their argument for its bestness is basically the following:

1 Nothing is better for a city than the coming to be in it of the best practicable (ὡς ἀρίστους: 456e4–5) women and men.
2 Having both men and women be guardians in the city would ensure the production of such women and men.
3 Having both men and women be guardians in the city "is therefore *not only practicable, but also best*" (Οὐ μόνον ἄρα δυνατὸν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄριστον: 457a3).

Here, as in many other passages,[94] Socrates and his interlocutors talk as if a city is not suitable for their purposes unless it is practicable.

And they not only talk but also act that way. Consider how much else in the *Republic* prior to the Book 5 passage has to do with practicability—in other words, how much of Socrates and his interlocutors' discussion is devoted, ostensibly,[95] to ensuring that their hypothetical city could exist. In Book 2, as soon as they start describing a hypothetical city, the first thing they ask is how to ensure that the city has adequate food, shelter, and clothing (369c–d). After they talk about the so-called city of pigs (372d5) and then start examining another city, they say that the other city needs more craftsmen than the city of pigs needed, and more land and, thus, guardians (373b–374d). When at first it seems flatly impracticable for there to be "a good guardian" (ἀγαθὸν φύλακα ἀδύνατον γενέσθαι: 375d1)—one who is both gentle enough with people in the city and ferocious enough toward enemies outside—Socrates and his interlocutors are momentarily stalled (ἀπορήσας: 375d3; ἀποροῦμεν: d4), and they resume the conversation only once it seems more hopeful that guardians could have the gentleness and ferociousness they need. The question becomes how to educate for this combination of qualities

(cf. esp. 416a2–d3), and that question occupies Socrates and his interlocutors through most of Book 4, leading in part through a discussion of how to keep the children in the city from being corrupted by corruptive poetry (Books 2 and 3). Then, when Socrates and his interlocutors discuss what wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, and injustice consist of, their discussion takes place within 17 Stephanus pages (427e6–444e5)—few compared to the almost 58 preceding pages (369d1–427c5) in which the aristocratic city comes together. And very little in the nearly 58 pages leads directly to the conclusions reached later in the 17 pages. There is, for example, an exchange in Book 3 (412e4–414a7) that prefigures the discussion of courage in Book 4. But the vast majority of the nearly 58 pages has to do with how the potential guardians could be shaped into suitable rulers.

To search for the just city the way I have just described is to assume that there is a practicability requirement—or, to proceed as if there is. If there is *not* a practicability requirement, then it is unnecessary to consider the sorts of things that Socrates and his interlocutors consider, such as how to secure enough food and how to guard against corruption; and in fact, considering these things may lead you to misconceive the just city. To see why, consider two possibilities.

One possibility is that the best practicable city is the same thing as the best *conceivable* city, meaning the best city that is logically possible. Perhaps, for example, a city *by definition* contains human beings, and human beings by definition are under the constraints of nature, such that a city which is not allowed by those constraints is inconceivable: it is on par with a square circle in the sense that the very idea of it is incoherent. If so, then there is a practicability requirement for sure.

But another possibility is that the best practicable city and the best conceivable city are different from each other, and the best conceivable city is purely fantastical. In an existing city, people need food, there can be children who are corruptible, faction can arise, and so on. But if the best conceivable city is purely fantastical, then it might be, for example, a city where no one needs food, people even can fly like superheroes, and they need only to love and be loved, if they have any needs at all. Of course, the best conceivable city might turn out to be different from this; but whatever it is, if it is purely fantastical then it will probably be *better* than the best practicable city. And in that case, so will the *just* city, if the just city is simply the best conceivable city.[96]

Socrates and his interlocutors proceed as if the just city is *not* the best conceivable city or as if the best conceivable city is no different from the best practicable city; they assume that there is a practicability requirement. If the just city is not the best practicable city, then it may be better than the city they end up advocating. They could get lucky and identify

the just city just by chance, but the just city needs to be the best practicable city if they are to depend on more than luck.

3.6.2 *Practicability After the Book 5 Passage*

Return to the part of Book 5 where Socrates makes three main proposals (referred to as waves). I have already mentioned the first proposal. The second proposal is that, among the guardians, all the men should share all the women, and all the adults should share all the children (457c–d). When Socrates proposes this arrangement, he and his interlocutors agree to start by asking whether it would be *best* and to postpone momentarily the discussion of whether it is *practicable* (457e–458b). And at first, they follow their plan: they start by discussing whether this arrangement would be best (458b–471c). But when Glaucon interrupts, demanding that Socrates finally address whether it is practicable (471c–e), Socrates resists and Glaucon backs down. This is where the critical passage appears, the part of the *Republic* that I have referred to as the Book 5 passage.

In that passage, Socrates asks, in part: "Do you think that what we say will be any less good if we can't show that it is practicable [δυνατόν] to found a city the same as the one in speech?" (472e2–4), and Glaucon agrees that it will not be. It can look as if the practicability requirement is cancelled here and that, after this passage, Socrates and his interlocutors no longer concern themselves with practicability or anything like it. The main reason has to do with another passage that appears later in the dialogue. At the end of Book 9, Socrates and his interlocutors agree with each other that their aristocratic city "has its place in speeches" and is "nowhere on earth" (592a10) and that probably (b5) "it doesn't make any difference whether [this city] is or will be somewhere on earth" (διαφέρει δὲ οὐδὲν εἴτε που ἔστιν εἴτε ἔσται: b2–3). In light of the Book 9 passage, Socrates in the Book 5 passage can seem to mean: "Just forget about practicability and everything else of that sort. They don't matter."

In fact, though, even if the practicability requirement is cancelled in the Book 5 passage, Socrates and his interlocutors go back to adhering to the practicability requirement by the time the passage in Book 9 appears, and they continue to assume the practicability requirement through the end of the dialogue. This is the interpretation I will defend in the rest of this section.

To start with, note how flexible the Book 9 passage is. In that passage, Socrates and his interlocutors need not mean that it is immaterial whether the aristocratic city *could* exist. Their point may be simply that it *does* not exist and, perhaps, that it never *will* exist, but that, even so, it can still be of use to the intelligent man who wants to found a similar city within himself so as to develop his soul properly (cf. 591c–592b, esp.

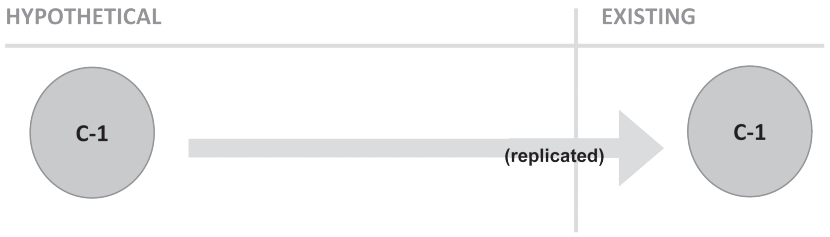
592b1–2). It would be consistent for Socrates and his interlocutors to say that the aristocratic city *has not* come to be and *never will* come to be but that it nonetheless *could* come to be. They might think that what will keep it from coming to be are simply certain contingencies rather than the constraints of nature per se. So Socrates and his interlocutors can utter the lines in the Book 9 passage even while adhering to the practicability requirement.

Of course, by itself the flexibility of the Book 9 passage does not count for much. But this passage not only *can* be but *needs* to be interpreted in the way I just described. Here is why. My explanation will be complicated, but that, I insist, is because of how labyrinthine the *Republic* itself turns out to be.

Consider, first, what Socrates and his interlocutors do in the Book 5 passage. Rather than simply cancelling the practicability requirement, they replace it with a similar, somewhat looser requirement, which we might call the approximation requirement.

> *Practicability requirement:* A hypothetical city is the just city only if it is *practicable*.
> *Approximation requirement:* A hypothetical city is the just city only if it could be *approximated* closely enough somewhere sometime by an existing city.

Let me explain the nature of the approximation requirement. When you ask whether a hypothetical city (call it **C-1**) is *practicable*, you are asking whether it could be *replicated* by an existing city (somewhere sometime).



By contrast, when you ask whether **C-1** is *approximable* (that is, whether it could be approximated closely enough by an existing city), you are asking whether there is a second hypothetical city (call it **C-2**) that meets two conditions:

- **C-2** is similar enough to **C-1**.
- **C-2** is *practicable* (in other words, it could be *replicated* by an existing city).

In the Book 5 passage, Socrates and his interlocutors agree to discuss whether the aristocratic city they have constructed so far (call it **AC-1**) is approximable: their question is whether there is a second hypothetical city (call it **AC-2**) which, on the one hand, is similar enough to **AC-1** and, on the other hand, is practicable. To see why, start with the Book 5 passage itself. In that passage, Socrates does not ask Glaucon to forget entirely about practicability and everything like it. Rather, Socrates simply asks Glaucon to be a bit less strict. All that Socrates proposes is that, rather than showing the practicability of a city *exactly* like the aristocratic city that he and his interlocutors have discussed so far (**AC-1**), it is enough to show the practicability of a city that is suitably similar. In the following part of the Book 5 passage, Socrates sets himself up to make a proposal of that sort:

> If we find out what justice is like, will we also insist that the just man must not differ *at all* from justice itself but be *in every way* such as it is [μηδὲν δεῖν αὐτῆς ἐκείνης διαφέρειν, ἀλλὰ πανταχῇ τοιοῦτον εἶναι οἷον δικαιοσύνη ἐστίν]? Or will we be content if he is *nearest* [ἐγγύτατα] to it and participates in it more than the others? (472b7–c2; cf. ὁμοιότατος and ὁμοιοτάτην at d1)

And then Socrates conveys his meaning more directly:

> Do you think that what we say will be any less good if we can't show that it is practicable to found a city *the same as* the one in speech [οὕτω πόλιν οἰκῆσαι ὡς ἐλέγετο]? (472e2–4)

> Don't compel me to present it [i.e., **AC-1**] as coming into being *in every way* in deed as we described it in speech [Τοῦτο μὲν δὴ μὴ ἀνάγκαζέ με, οἷα τῷ λόγῳ διήλθομεν, τοιαῦτα παντάπασι καὶ τῷ ἔργῳ δεῖν γιγνόμενα <ἂν> ἀποφαίνειν]. But if we're able to find how

> a city might be managed *most similarly* [ἐγγύτατα] to what's been said [i.e., to **AC-1**], say that we've found the practicability [δυνατά] of these things' coming to be on which you insist. (473a5–b1)

Note especially the way Socrates begins the last line I just quoted ("*If* we're able to find how a city might be managed most similarly to what's been said …"). Rather than dismissing Glaucon entirely in the Book 5 passage, Socrates apparently leaves himself the task of showing that **AC-1** is approximable—in other words, that there is a second hypothetical city (**AC-2**) that is practicable and is similar enough to **AC-1**. (Presumably, the test will be whether it is similar *enough* to **AC-1** rather than similar *at all* or literally *most* similar. Surely some city will be similar to *some* degree, and inevitably some city or cities will be more similar than all other cities.)

What happens after the Book 5 passage makes it plain enough that the task *is* to demonstrate that **AC-1** is approximable. Right after the Book 5 passage, Socrates and Glaucon agree that next they must try to establish what it would take for there to be a city that is suitably similar to **AC-1** (473b4–c1), and this is what they go on to do. First Socrates claims (in introducing the final "wave") that there could be a suitably similar city as long as philosopher-rulers are practicable (δυνατοῦ: 473c4; see c–d, esp. c2–4), and next he and his interlocutors discuss at length whether philosophers could come to power (5.474c–6.502c).

Notice what this must mean. It must be that, by introducing the idea of philosopher-rulers, Socrates effectively proposes an **AC-2**, a second aristocratic city that is supposed to be both *similar enough* to **AC-1** and *practicable*. What he does here is simply add philosopher-rulers to **AC-1**, and this addition is enough of a change that, ostensibly, it creates a distinct city, **AC-2**.

Now, scholars disagree about whether **AC-2** is actually distinct from **AC-1**. On one interpretation, **AC-2** (the aristocratic city discussed after the Book 5 passage) *is* distinct insofar as it contains philosopher-rulers. On another view, **AC-1** (the aristocratic city discussed before the Book 5 passage) already contains philosopher-rulers, and this simply goes unnoted in the early stages of the *Republic*.[97] Regardless, *if* the two cities are distinct from each other, the main difference between them—perhaps the only substantial difference—is just that **AC-2** contains philosopher-rulers.[98] This is the case when Socrates first introduces **AC-2**, and it remains the case through the end of the dialogue.

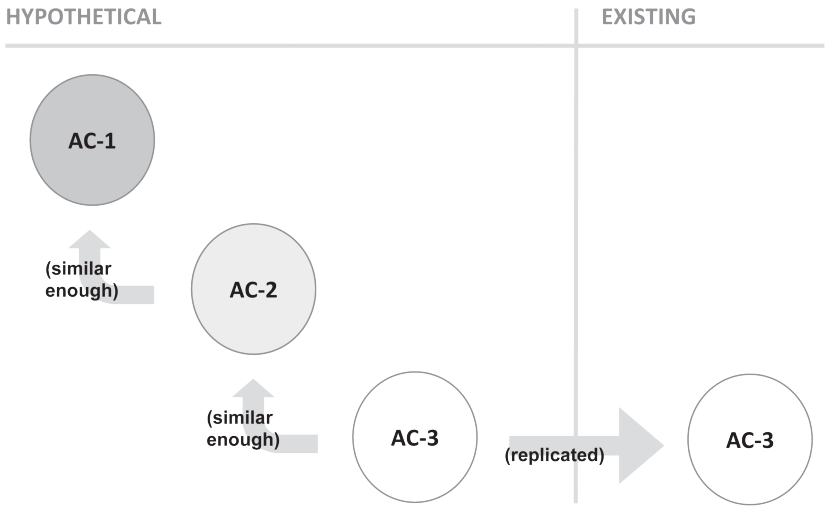
Moreover, after the Book 5 passage Socrates and his interlocutors never voice any doubt that a city should perform the functions which, as early as in Book 2, they have acted as if it should perform (for example, the function of shaping children's education and rearing well enough to produce rulers who are suitably ferocious toward the city's enemies and sufficiently gentle with its citizens) or that in order to perform those functions a city needs to have the features named prior to the Book 5

passage, such as the sharing of women and children. In fact, the point of adding philosopher-rulers into the equation is, ostensibly, to ensure that **AC-2** (= **AC-1**?) *could* perform those functions by those means.[99] One reason this is clear enough is that the question which motivates the long discussion (5.474c–6.502c) that begins right after the Book 5 passage is whether there could be a city in which women and children were shared,[100] and in that discussion the basis for saying that there *could* be such a city is that there could be philosopher-rulers (who, presumably, would ensure that women and children *were* shared; cf., e.g., 423e5–424a4).

Understandably, then, Socrates and his interlocutors never discuss whether **AC-2** is *similar* enough to **AC-1**. (Evidently, they are confident either that **AC-2** is similar enough to **AC-1** or that it is identical to it; see, e.g., 502c2–4.) But they do talk about whether **AC-2** is *practicable*. In fact, they discuss it at length—for example, by having the long conversation about whether philosophers could come to power (5.474c–6.502c). It is not until Book 7 that Socrates and his interlocutors explicitly agree that **AC-2** is practicable (540d–541b).

Let me emphasize that their issue is not whether **AC-2** is *approximable*, for example, but whether it is *practicable*. Even in the Book 5 passage, Socrates can seem to indicate that he will try to demonstrate (ἀποδεῖξαι: 472e7) practicability (δυνατώτατ': e8; see e6–9) or, at least, something similar to it. More important, right after the Book 5 passage, when he first mentions philosopher-rulers explicitly, his claim, again, is that it is practicable (δυνατοῦ: 473c4) for philosophers to rule. Further, in the long discussion about whether it is practicable for philosophers to come to power (5.474c–6.502c), he and his interlocutors talk as though, if it is not, there is a problem with the idea of philosopher-rulers (see, e.g., the phrase βέλτιστα, εἴπερ δυνατά, "best, provided [that it's] practicable," at 502c2). And the agreement about **AC-2** that Socrates and his interlocutors reach in Book 7 is, explicitly, that **AC-2** is practicable (δυνατά: 540d3).

How, though, do they go back to adhering to the practicability requirement? Well, here, finally, is the twist. When they originally plan to show that **AC-2** is practicable and, in turn, that **AC-1** is approximable, the underlying thought, of course, must be that **AC-1** is preferable to **AC-2**. But in the course of the conversation, something odd happens: **AC-2** becomes their city of choice, and it remains their city of choice through the end of the dialogue. Perhaps, as some scholars suggest, Socrates and his interlocutors conclude that **AC-2** is *better* than **AC-1** (cf. 543a1–c4, 543d1–544a1, 544b3). Perhaps, instead, they decide that **AC-2** and **AC-1** are *identical* to each other. But the important point for my purposes is that once **AC-2** becomes their candidate for the just city, they don't then change course and ask whether *it* is approximable—in other words, whether there is a third hypothetical city (**AC-3**) which is both similar enough to **AC-2** (= **AC-1**?) and practicable.



Rather, for the remainder of the *Republic* they stick with their argument that **AC-2** is practicable. Ultimately, then, they argue not that their city of choice could be approximated closely enough, but that it is practicable. So in the end, they go back to assuming the practicability requirement. Of course, it may not be their intention to do so. But they do so regardless. Thus, the same point I made above applies here, too: they need to be *correct* that the just city is the best practicable city. And in that case, they need to demonstrate that the aristocratic city is practicable.

Whether Plato sees all of this is less certain. Specifically, it is unclear whether he sees the following two features of their discussion: that they switch back to assuming the practicability requirement and that their assumption needs to be correct. But there is a good chance that he sees both.

First, he may well realize that they switch back. Though the switch back is extremely complicated, all that is required to see it is to keep track of the conversation meticulously; and the *Republic* emphasizes the importance of keeping track of things, even a conversation that is complicated (6.486c–d, 8.543b–544b). In fact, since one mark of a philosophical soul is supposed to be that they have a good enough memory to keep their thoughts straight (486c–d), Plato might even make the *Republic* as byzantine as it is in order to test whether we can meet its standard.

Further, if he *is* aware that Socrates and his interlocutors switch back to assuming the practicability requirement, he probably realizes that they need to be correct in assuming it. Otherwise it is hard to explain the Book 5 passage, meaning the fact that they shift temporarily from

assuming the practicability requirement to accepting the approximation requirement. The Book 5 passage draws attention to the idea that there might be a city which is better than the best practicable city; and it is hard to see what else the purpose of this passage is. It would make sense for Plato to include it in order to invite readers to reflect on the practicability requirement, but why else would he have Socrates and his interlocutors shift in the Book 5 passage, if Plato is aware that they ultimately switch back to assuming the practicability requirement? Though there are other explanations besides the one I just named, this one, at the least, is probably the most charitable.[101]

3.7 Conclusion

It can seem at first that approaching Plato my way would not count as teaching him, for example, or doing Plato scholarship, but I think that, all things considered, it could. To say it could not, we would need to claim that it would co-opt Plato. I have argued that that claim would be misguided because of how little we know about how Plato meant for us to use his dialogues. We know so little because of the problem of a hermeneutic circle, as I called it, borrowing a term. The problem is that we interpreters may have assumptions that deeply affect our judgments about which interpretive claims are true, and for the most part we may be unable to unearth these assumptions so as to determine which of them are true and which are false. If so, then we are unable to arbitrate among many interpretations that conflict with one another fundamentally. This is due both to the nature of interpretation and to the nature of Plato's particular writings. Plato's dialogues are harder to interpret than dialogues such as Berkeley's and Hume's, and it is particularly plausible to think that our assumptions determine our interpretive judgments about Plato. For this and other reasons, it is extraordinarily difficult to show that they do not, so that for the moment, at least, we are stuck with the hermeneutic circle. Of course, maybe, as one scholar has said, "we should never give up trying" to know Plato's intentions, even if we will never know them.[102] And perhaps we *will* come to know them sometime: maybe we will find a solution to the problem I have described. But we have not found it yet, and for that reason, especially, we need not be sticklers about being true to Plato.

Notes

1. Heath 2013, 11. Many other Plato commentators besides Heath have bracketed the question of whether Socrates or some other character in the dialogues is Plato's mouthpiece (for discussion and criticism, see Kraut 2017, §6). There is a parallel with Socratic studies. It is an attempt to understand not the historical Socrates, but just a fictional Socrates (mainly the one who appears in certain Platonic dialogues), and many Socratic

scholars try to piece together this Socrates' views without claiming that Plato or any other real-life person ever endorsed them (see esp. Brickhouse and Smith 2010, 11–42).

2. And incidentally, one scholar has even argued that *Plato was incorrect* about what Socrates' strategies are in the dialogues. Beversluis' (2000) thesis is that although, as Plato conceives him, Socrates aims to improve people, many of his arguments are so weak and sophistical that "his actual goal … is not to improve anyone, but simply to win arguments" (36).
3. Barnes 2011, 31. Dancy (2004), among others, is similar to Barnes; see note 51 in §1.3.3 above.
4. Cohen and Keyt 1992, 196, emphasis in the original.
5. Cohen and Keyt 1992, 200. In a similar spirit, Reshotko (2012, 440) wonders "whether our time is better spent trying to reconstruct Plato's intentions in writing the dialogues or focusing on what we learn, philosophically, when we read them." Rudebusch (2009, 57) writes that "*everything important in human life hangs on the question whether Socrates' arguments are sound*—not on the biographical question: 'What were Plato's goals when he wrote the dialogues?'" (emphasis in the original). Pappas (2004, 219) says: "If you consider [the *Republic* protreptic] then learn from it and become a philosopher. Don't waste your energy reconstructing Plato's intention." Of course, perhaps Cohen and Keyt, e.g., would not accept interpretations that *clash* with the text; maybe their point was just that we should fill in gaps where the text *underdetermines* the correct interpretation. Regardless, there are other commentators whose interpretations are explicitly unPlatonic. E.g., toward the end of a recent book on the *Phaedrus*, one commentator writes: "No doubt Plato himself would take issue with parts of my [interpretation], were he alive today and capable of reading it. So while I believe this book offers a reading of the *Phaedrus* and of Platonic myth that is more fruitful than many of the previous readings, ultimately I hope that my own readers will accept it in the way that I have accepted Plato's dialogues—as an invitation to further conversation, inquiry, and debate" (Werner 2012, 268). By his own description, this commentator interprets the *Phaedrus* just insofar as he tries to piece together one significant and defensible meaning that *we can* ascribe to it. He measures the success of his interpretation by how "fruitful" it is, meaning, evidently, how much it helps us make philosophical progress and know ourselves (see 18, 269, 271). In that respect, he is only somewhat different from many of the most prominent scholars in Plato studies. E.g., Irwin (1988, 199) said that the main test of an interpretive approach to Plato is whether it has "philosophically interesting and significant results."
6. See Heath 2013, 11; Barnes 2011, 30; Cohen and Keyt 1992, 200. Werner (2012, 268, 271), mentioned in note 5 above, says the same thing about his practice that Heath and Cohen and Keyt say about theirs.
7. See Dworkin 2011, esp. ch. 7.
8. For critical discussion of Dworkin's theory, see the symposium in Kitchell and Segal 2010.
9. Dworkin also says, by the way, that it can be sensible enough to claim that some particular object of interpretation underdetermines our interpretations of it. His view is just that the claim about underdetermination will itself be an interpretation of the object and that this interpretation will have to compete with rival interpretations, will have to be judged by the same standards that they are judged by, and will have to produce the same sort of evidence that they are expected to produce (see 2011, esp. 148–49).

10. Dworkin 2011, 153.
11. At least, neither has an *epistemic* advantage, as opposed to a prudential advantage. An epistemic reason to believe something (e.g., that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece) is reason to think it is true. A prudential reason to perform some action (e.g., to suppose that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece) is reason to think that performing this action will further your ends.
12. Ferrari (1997, 62) borrows the term and points to the same problem in a case involving Strauss. There are similar claims in Werner 2012, 270–71n.16; Morrison 2007, 241; Dillon 1999, 222; Dorter 1994, 9; Griswold 1986, 10. Barnes (2011, 27) and Rowe (2002, 308ff.) doubt that there is a hermeneutic circle, in the language Barnes also uses.
13. See Sedley 1983, 10: "What above all characterizes Hellenistic skepticism is, I would claim, its abandonment of ['the desire for knowledge']—its radical conviction that to suspend assent and to resign oneself to ignorance is not a bleak expedient but, on the contrary, a highly desirable intellectual achievement." Contrast Annas 1992, 48: "The ancient sceptic … is primarily a seeker after truth. … he wants to have knowledge or at least true belief; it is just that there do always seem to be problems which have not been successfully met."
14. Sayre (1995) is one recent commentator whose interpretation is similar to the "mystical view." For some history, see Blackburn 2006, 103–11. The "arcanum view" reflects interpretations that first emerged in the late 18th century and, most notably, is reminiscent of the so-called Tübingen school of Plato interpretation (see the extensive bibliography in Nikulin 2012). Vogt's (2012) interpretation of Plato is "ataraxic" in certain very limited respects, and a number of other interpreters besides Vogt seem to have read Plato's dialogues as skeptical works of one kind or another, including Academic skeptics such as Arcesilaus (see Cicero, *Academica* 1.46, 2.13–15, *De Oratore* 3.67) and others after antiquity (discussed in Press 1996, 66–67, among other places).
15. Cf. *Apology* 22b3–c8, *Gorgias* 465a2–5, 500e4–501a3, *Meno* 98a, *Phaedo* 76b8–c3, *Phaedrus* 278c5–6, *Republic* 531e3–5, *Theaetetus* 187b2–210b3, *Timaeus* 51e3–4. Scholars have debated whether, for Plato, the ability to give an adequate *logos* is itself knowledge (e.g., contrast Fine 2003b with Gerson 2003). But even if he believes it is not, passages such as *Republic* 534b3–d2 suggest that this ability at least *accompanies* knowledge (as Gerson 2003, 160n.13, 186 seems to think it might). For Rowe (2007, 233–36), perhaps, Socrates means not that we must be able to answer every objection that *can* be raised, but simply that we need to have deflected the objections that *have* been raised. Yet in taking that stance, Socrates would confuse an analysis of what knowledge is with the practice of knowledge-attribution.
16. Gonzalez's (1998, 239–40) and Sayre's (1995, 194–95) claims are similar to this.
17. E.g., they can say this about the fact that the Platonic dialogues are in dialogue form. This is what Sayre (1995) did in offering an interpretation which is similar to the mystical view. As Sayre saw it, Plato thinks that in order to condition readers properly he needs to set up συνουσίαι ("conversations," in Sayre's translation) between his writings and his readers, and he believes he can do this better by means of dialogues than by means of treatises.
18. For a sample of various standards of simplicity, see Baker 2003, 247–48; Sober 2001, 15–23; Swinburne 2001, 82–90.

19. Note, e.g., that when proponents of any of these views ran into parts of the Platonic corpus that posed problems for them by their own lights, they could say that all the troublesome parts of the text were just interpolated by someone other than Plato. (This sort of move appears here and there in Tejera 1997, among other places.) They could say this even if the only rationale for it was that it salvaged their view.
20. Gerson (2013, 38) makes the following claim: At the least, we have to say that Plato's dialogues are meant to turn us to philosophy, whereupon we must infer that Plato accepted all or some of the arguments in the dialogues whose conclusions are about the nature or value of philosophy, and then we are shut in to saying that Plato accepted the metaphysics that comes with those arguments. The problem with Gerson's claim, I think, is that there are a variety of reasons for which Plato might present arguments, even arguments whose conclusions imply that we should philosophize. At times, e.g., Socrates may offer an argument to his interlocutors just to annoy or provoke them in a way that gets them invested in combatting the argument, or he may mean to entice them with a view that is compelling but not quite adequate, so that they will want to improve on it. I.e., sometimes Socrates may hope to entangle people in philosophizing more than persuade them into it. When the conclusion of one of his arguments implies that we should philosophize, it may do so only as a safeguard. If the conclusion implied something else and his listeners just accepted the argument, they might not see any need to philosophize. This way, maybe they still will, even if they are unconfused.
21. I mean that there are few cases where we know even that we have *approximately* reconstructed Plato's intentions, to borrow a Gadamerian idea from Renaud (2000, 377ff.). I should add that the situation is different from, say, the sorts of cases that contemporary Anglophone philosophers consider in discussing the epistemology of disagreement. In some of those cases, according to certain epistemologists, a range of conflicting views can all be justified. But "epistemologists … agree that there are situations in which the available evidence is insufficient ['to decide which of the disagreeing positions should be adopted'], and that in such situations suspension of judgment is required" (Machuca 2013, 73). The situation I am pointing to is a situation of that sort.
22. We learn some, though; see esp. Cotton 2014, 123. Cotton also has a way to say that our distance from the characters is, in fact, part of why the drama is important; see her ch. 4. And on similarities between Plato's dialogues and other Greek narratives, see Erler 2016, which contains other references.
23. Burnyeat (2003, 23) makes this point, referring to how Plato views his Thrasymachus. Burnyeat sees this as a reason not to overplay the drama in the dialogues, but here I think it helps the case for taking the drama seriously. By the way, it is common to say that, for Plato, beliefs constitute the self; the idea is discussed here and there in Moore 2015, which contains other references.
24. Would each of us also have to allow that we are just a brain in a vat? No, I think—the question about the external world is disanalogous to questions about Plato's intentions. First, we have resources in the case of the external world that we do not have in Plato's case; arguably, e.g., Hilary Putnam's Twin Earth thought experiment would let us say there is an external world even if nothing else did (see Putnam 1975). More important, in the case of the external world there is a fact of the matter for sure—either there is an external world or not—whereas there might not be a fact of the matter

about what Plato actually intended or what the texts indicate he intended; at least, the texts might give us only conflicting indications about what Plato's intentions were. Thanks to Robert Talisse for helpful discussion of this.

25. Zamir (2007, 112–28) is one who makes this claim, though not in these words.
26. Some history: Strauss (1964, 59) compared the form of Plato's dialogues to that of Shakespeare's plays, and Burnyeat (1998, 342) famously objected. About a decade later, Schofield (1996, 51) wrote that it is "by now commonplace" to say that "a Platonic dialogue is the dramatic representation of a conversation between interlocutors none of whom can be assumed to be merely spokesman for Plato's own views, any more than in any other form of drama." Many other scholars have made similar claims (e.g., Wolfsdorf 2008, 6 and Sedley 2002, 38).
27. Gerson (2013, 89n.39) is right that philosophical treatises and Shakespearean plays are not the only possible analogs to the Platonic dialogues. Burnyeat (2001, 4–5) also seems correct: "What we know about [Aristotle's dialogues] hardly suggests that they were much more open to varied interpretations than his treatises. … little or nothing about Plato's genius is to be explained by the fact that … he wrote dialogues. What matters is the way Plato wrote *his* dialogues." I should note that Hume's case is not quite as cut-and-dried as I will make out here; see Black and Gressis 2017.
28. E.g., he defends hedonism in the *Protagoras* and rejects it in the *Gorgias*, as I mentioned in §1.3.3 above. Disparities of this sort matter because we have to interpret Plato's dialogues in light of one another or explain why they should be read independently of one another, and although there are arguments for reading them independently of one another, these arguments are, at the least, not knockdown-dragout. See again Gerson's (2013, 36ff.) and Brickhouse and Smith's (2010, 31–34) responses to them.
29. See §2.4.2 above.
30. See esp. Riginos 1976. Annas (1999, 73) may have overstated the point in saying that "our 'biographical' information about Plato crumbles at the touch." E.g., there is considerable evidence that Plato visited Tarentum; see esp. Huffman 2005, 32–42.
31. See Burnyeat and Frede 2015 for arguments against authenticity and discussion of arguments for it.
32. Annas 1999, 75.
33. Besides Annas 1999, 75–76, see Blondell 2002, 38 and Griswold 1993, 205. Even mainstream Anglophone commentators have described Plato as "devious" (e.g., Kahn 2007, 34), "sneaky" (e.g., Schofield 1996, 51n.4), and strategically elliptical (e.g., Gill 2012, 5). Some have even said that he intentionally offers some weak arguments in the dialogues (e.g., Scott 2011, 181), and others believe he is willing to lie if he thinks it will conduce to someone's moral improvement (e.g., Woolf 2009).
34. Tarrant 2000, 47. Passages where Aristotle seems to identify certain ideas as specifically Socratic include *Eudemian Ethics* 1216b2–9, *Magna Moralia* 1182a15–26, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b23–27.
35. Fine 1992, 14, referring to what is "generally" (13) Aristotle's strategy even in works such as the *Metaphysics* (987a–988a, 990a–993a, 1078b–1080a). Cf. Fine 1993, 28, describing just the strategy in *On Ideas* (a work ascribed to Aristotle): "Aristotle … aims to record, not Plato's clear intentions and commitments, but a reconstructed version of his arguments, one that aims to provide philosophical illumination."

36. See Gallagher 2011 and esp. Halliwell 2006. On the larger point here, cf. McCabe 2015, 6–7 and Vogt 2012, 5n.5.
37. Irwin (1992, 78; 1988, 199) concedes the latter point.
38. See Steel 2012, 167–200, esp. 169: "It often seems as if Aristotle had no inside information from Plato on how to interpret a dialogue … Aristotle apparently attempts to explain [all of] Plato's texts as all subsequent readers of Plato have done until now, without having any privileged relation to the author of the dialogues"; Peterson 2011, 224–27; Kahn 1996, 81–87. Rowe (2007, 43–48) makes a similar point. Halliwell 2006 contains responses to Irwin (1995, 5–7; 1992, 77, 88–89n.83; 1988, 199) and to others including Stalley (1991, 183–84n.5), whose claim about *Politics* 1274b9–11 is virtually identical to Fink's (2012, 186). In Irwin 2008, the claims about Aristotle's testimony are far more subdued than the claims in Irwin's earlier essays. E.g., Irwin even says that Aristotle "may have been wrong to treat the views of the Platonic Socrates as Plato's views" (85) and that Aristotle's works "contain no evidence of his having asked Plato to explain what [Plato's dialogues] meant" (67). For responses to Steel and to Kahn, among others, see Gerson 2013, 56n.49, 87, 97–100 and Penner 2002, 204n.2.
39. See Ward 2008. My quotations are from 14.
40. Scholars such as Burnyeat (2001, 13) and Annas (1981, 232–40) have held that he hopes to convince us by some means other than argument. By contrast, others such as Shields (2012, 82) and Reeve (1988, 61–62) have thought that even the argument for Forms at *Republic* 5.475e–480a is supposed to be successful and is supposed to convert everyone. Bobonich (2007, 159n.6) doubts it is supposed to convert non-philosophers. White (1979, 159) suspects it is "a summary of a more complete argument" that Plato has. Zeyl (2000, lxiv) thinks it is not even about Forms and that there is no argument for Forms anywhere in Plato's so-called middle dialogues. Ferejohn (2006, 154) suspects that in the *Republic* the theory of Forms is just "a hypothesis to be explored," whereas in the *Phaedo* (esp. 72e–76a) Plato argues for it in earnest.
41. For discussion and references, see McDavid 2019. As I mention below (§3.6.2), some commentators think there is more than one aristocratic city described in the *Republic*. Here and below, unless otherwise noted, readers who hold that view can take me to refer to the aristocratic city that is endorsed by the end of the dialogue.
42. Commentators such as Kamtekar (2010) and Annas (1999, ch. 4) are drawn to the view that the *Republic* is apolitical, though most of them, more than Waterfield (1993), see problems with this view.
43. Part of why the view about the city of pigs is plausible is that in the *Republic* Socrates calls the city of pigs the "true" and "healthy" city (372e6–7). Part of why it is plausible to say that the *Republic* is apolitical is that, in Book 2 (368c–369a), Socrates introduces the *Republic*'s political discussion (the discussion of justice in a city) as if it will be just an extension of an ethical discussion (the discussion of justice in the soul).
44. See note 14 in §3.2 above.
45. I put this cautiously since it is hard to tell what Strauss actually believed. Regardless, see Morrison 2007, 233 and Lane 2001, 105–06. For a different view about Strauss' reading, see Ferrari 1997.
46. See Roochnik 2003.
47. Grondin 2010, 146.
48. Beversluis (2006, 106) asks this rhetorical question: "Has any reader of the *Euthyphro* ever doubted—not in obedience to some *a priori* hermeneutical theory but really doubted—that Plato believes that pious things

are loved by the gods because they are pious rather than pious because they are loved by the gods, as Euthyphro believes?"

49. Why think so? I have met such people. I don't know what else to say, or what else one needs to say, in reply to scholars such as Beversluis, quoted in note 48 above.
50. Peterson 2011, 121.
51. See Peterson 2011, 5, 250.
52. Crotty (2016, 48–49n.1) doubts that she can.
53. This evidently is the real sticking point for Politis (2015, 190n.6) and Taylor (2012, 107).
54. When commentators claim that the city of pigs is supposed to be the ideal city, the linchpin of their argument often is Socrates' comment at 372e6–7; see Rowe 2017, 58–59 and Jonas et al. 2012, 342.
55. Findlay 1974, 6. This sort of sentiment has been common. E.g., noting that Roslyn Weiss' Socrates is "more or less devoid of philosophical doctrine," Waterfield (2007, 615) wrote that he "is not someone one would want to spend an evening with: he would have nothing interesting to contribute to the discussion, except the ability to pick holes in what everyone else was saying."
56. Barnes 1995, xvi. See my comments in §4.2 below.
57. See esp. reasons C, a, c, d, e, g, and i in ch. 4 below.
58. Pappas 2004, 218.
59. Gerson 2013, 58n.52.
60. Taylor 2012, 107.
61. See esp. Wilburn 2011, 450. As far as I know, only Butler (2015), Labriola (2015), and Reshotko (2012) have responded to Peterson at length in print.
62. For the claim that it is practicable, see 375e5–7, 415d2–3, 423d8–424b1, 425d7–e2, 456c1–4, 457a4–5, c1–3, 473c4, 499c1–500e4, 502c5–8, 520d7–521a2, 540d1–541b5.
63. I recognize that, on certain readings (e.g., Burnyeat's 2006, 3 and Long's 2005, 181), the aristocratic argument is provisional and is not supposed to provide a full-blown demonstration that the aristocratic city is just. When I ask whether Socrates and his interlocutors *show* one thing or another, my question will be simply whether they provide an argument that meets Plato's standards. I will ask the question this way just to keep my language from being too cumbersome.
64. Cf. Schofield 2006, 238 and Strauss 1964, 126. Ober (1998, 238–39) thinks that *justice* prohibits them from using force. Annas' (2017, 27) concern is that the philosophers who reared the children would have "been brought up under the old, disastrously wrong, and unimprovable institutions, and therefore still tainted with the defects that motivated sending away the other adults. … Kallipolis can be brought about only by people who have already been brought up in Kallipolis."
65. Certain commentators have thought that, early in the *Republic*, the term 'practicable' means more than this (see esp. Bloom 1968, 389 and Strauss 1964, 118, 125–26). Regardless, throughout the *Republic* it must mean nothing less, since, on the one hand, there is nothing less one can plausibly mean in asking whether something could exist, and on the other hand, Socrates and his interlocutors' question "Is the city practicable?" must be, at the minimum, "Could the city exist?" Otherwise it makes too little sense that they *debate* the question the way they do (see below on how they debate it). If the question were not whether the city could work in practice—if, instead, the question were simply about what the city is as they have *conceived* it—their only debate should be about how they have agreed to conceive it.

66. There are certain issues I can bracket here even in using the term 'nature'. E.g., are the psychological constraints due to the nature of the immortal soul rather than, say, the nature of physical matter? In part, this depends on whether the immortal soul in the *Republic* is supposed to contain not only reason but also spiritedness and appetite (on that issue, see Scott 2015, 53 and Lorenz 2006, 36–38). Another question is whether the constraints of nature result from the nature of matter per se. Sedley (2007) might be right to deny that, in Plato's *Timaeus*, the intransigence of matter is what resists intelligent persuasion enough to cause evil in the world. So, at least if we are to read the *Republic* in light of the *Timaeus*, the constraints of nature might involve, in Sedley's language (121), simply the "demands of biology," e.g., rather than the "nature of matter." And take the possibility mentioned below (note 96 in §3.6.1) that being under the constraints of nature lets a city be better than it otherwise could be. If it does, then the constraints of nature—perhaps—are even required by the Forms, even if there is no Form of the just city, as many commentators have held there is not (e.g., Ferrari 2003, 105 and Burnyeat 1999, 297–99). In fact, if there is a paradigm (or, model: παράδειγμα) of the just city laid up in heaven, as Socrates says at 592b1–2 there might be, this paradigm may even be under the constraints of nature. These latter possibilities are remote, perhaps, but they *would* help to make sense of how empirical Socrates and his interlocutors' discussion of the just city can seem to be despite passages such as *Phaedo* 65e8–66a1 and *Republic* 532a6.
67. Burnyeat 1999, 307. The idea here and in the rest of this paragraph is Burnyeat's. In defense of it, he rightly pointed to the speed of the inference at 456b7–c4 and the inference envisaged at 485a.
68. Thanks to Myles Burnyeat for the following idea. For a similar proposal, see Vegetti 2013, 113.
69. Scholars such as Hodkinson (2002, 105) and Kennell (1995, 132) think that boys in the *agōgē* lived in barracks apart from their families starting at the age of either seven or twelve. Other scholars such as Ducat (2006, 125) express doubt.
70. Rather than, e.g., in the sort of "faraway colonies" that Weiss (2012, 117n.66) considers.
71. There are passages (e.g., 484b4–5, 505a2–506b2, 506c2–12, 517c3–5, 519c8–d2) which clearly suggest that at least certain generations of the philosopher-rulers would know the Good—viz., the second generation and later generations, which, unlike the first generation, would benefit from the system of education that the first generation would implement. Other passages suggest that the philosopher-rulers' knowledge of the Good would be extensive (see 505e–506b with Long 2013, 22–30). Nonetheless, what I say below is compatible even with Rowe's (2007, ch. 7) view that none of the philosopher-rulers, as Plato conceives them, would actually know the Good.
72. See 499d–501e. Bobonich (2007, 154) names these three reasons. I borrow his phrasing and modify it somewhat. He suspects that, in Plato's view, the masses should be offered the motivational reason instead of the epistemic reason. Kamtekar (2004, 160) remains mostly neutral but apparently thinks they would be offered the motivational reason at the least. Vasiliou (2008, 236–46) holds that, in Plato's view, the masses should be offered the epistemic reason, too.
73. See 489c5 (ἀχρήστους), d5 (ἄχρηστοι), 490d2 (ἀχρήστους), e3 (ἀχρήστους). Is it *impracticable*, in Plato's view, for the masses to believe otherwise before someone tries to change their view? Maybe not. But there is considerable

reason to think it is. One claim later in the *Republic* is that degenerate people rationalize when they are in the grip of the baser parts of the soul and, as a result, are increasingly deaf to *logos* (see esp. 560a–561d). And note that, in the Books 5–6 passage that I just drew from, the claim is not only that the masses think the true philosophers are useless but also that, because of the masses, the true philosophers may be at risk when a young philosophic soul decides to turn away from the mob and take up philosophy (494d–495a).

74. For commentators such as Fine (2003b), Irwin (1995, 141–47), and Annas (1981, 276–93), knowledge on Plato's model is propositional, and Plato is a coherentist who thinks that to know the Form of the Good is to have accounts of all the Forms, accounts which are interwoven with one another and which together explain the intelligible order of the world. In line with this holist interpretation, Fine says that "the form of the good is not a distinct form, but the teleological structure of things; individual forms are its parts …" (2003a, 98; cf. Annas 1999, 108 and Irwin 1995, 272). Interpretations that reject a propositional picture of the Good point to comparable obstacles (as their proponents often note; examples include Silverman 2014, §16; Santas 2010, 144; Gerson 2003). If, e.g., knowledge of Forms is acquaintance with objects that are sharply distinct from the concepts deployed and the propositions exchanged in discursive inquiry (à la Gerson, among others), discursive inquiry may be ill-equipped to yield knowledge of Forms.
75. The *Republic* does not mention the doctrine of recollection but may allude to it; for discussion, see Dorter 2006, 80.
76. For Sedley (2006), e.g., Plato in the *Phaedo* "is at pains to avoid tying his whole argument to the choice of resemblance as the correct account of the vexed Form-particular relationship" (321), but Plato struggled to find a satisfactory alternative to the resemblance account, and "to judge from his persistent adherence to it in both *Republic* and *Timaeus*, the resemblance model is the one on which Plato eventually settled" (322).
77. On contrary predicates, see *Phaedo* 74b7–10, 102b3–d2, *Republic* 523b–525a. Perhaps Plato thinks that sensible particulars which are *F* are "deficiently" *F* (*Phaedo* 74d6–8, d9–e5, 75a11–b3) not in the sense that they are *approximately F* but just in the sense that they are *contingently F*, as many commentators now hold. See Reshotko 2014 for objections to that reading and for other references.
78. Of course, though we need to scrutinize exemplifications of the Form of *F*-ness in investigating what *F*-ness might be, perhaps we need not make *continual* reference to them in the course of inquiry, as Osborne (1995) emphasizes. The danger is just that, in whatever way, the sensible world will ineluctably color our reflections, so that we will not see far enough beyond it to glimpse the Forms fully enough.
79. Gerson (2006) ascribes to Plato a certain transcendental argument for the knowability of the Good. But it is not clear how to construe the argument so that it does not commit the fallacy of the undistributed middle in the following way:

    If S is capable of knowledge, then S is capable of self-reflexivity.
    If S is capable of belief, then S is capable of self-reflexivity.
    Therefore, if S is capable of belief, then S is capable of knowledge.

    Perhaps the main premises in the argument are supposed to be, instead:

    If S is capable of knowledge, then S is capable of self-reflexivity.
    S is capable of belief *iff* S is capable of self-reflexivity.

But what follows from those two premises is not "If S is capable of belief, then S is capable of knowledge," but "If S is capable of *knowledge*, then S is capable of *belief*." Plus, on Gerson's interpretation, apparently, the self-reflexivity essential for belief is not identical to the self-reflexivity essential for knowledge—i.e., the self-reflexivity mentioned in the first set of premises shown above is multiply realizable (see 466). Thanks to Scott Aikin for helpful discussion of this.

80. Herein, ultimately, it does not matter much whether Mikalson (2010, 18n.60) is right about the following: "'Wise' is not a descriptor of the gods of the popular, cult tradition, and in the poetic tradition the wisdom (or justice or morality) of the gods or of individual gods can be either strongly affirmed or strongly rejected, depending on the author and the work. That *all* the gods, or the one god, are 'wise' and 'just' is first fully worked out in the Socratic tradition... ." If Plato (who is integral to the Socratic tradition) was an instrumental force behind the view that only gods can be fully wise, then his abandonment of that view would be especially conspicuous to his readers; and see the text to notes 85 and 87 below.
81. On Platonic chronologies, see Irwin 2008, 77–84 and Kahn 2002, which contain other references. I can hedge about whether the *Apology* or *Phaedo*, e.g., was written or circulated before the *Republic* was—and e.g., whether the *Republic*'s Socrates is supposed to be the same character as the Socrates in other Platonic dialogues. All I need to say is this: When Plato wrote the *Republic*, he likely envisioned that many of his readers might at some point gain access to the *Apology* or *Phaedo* in generally the form in which we have them.
82. 278d3–6: Τὸ μὲν σοφόν, ὦ Φαῖδρε, καλεῖν ἔμοιγε μέγα εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ θεῷ μόνῳ πρέπειν· τὸ δὲ ἢ φιλόσοφον ἢ τοιοῦτόν τι μᾶλλόν τε ἂν αὐτῷ καὶ ἁρμόττοι καὶ ἐμμελεστέρως ἔχοι. I slightly modify Forster's (2006, 18) translation. On relations among terms such as 'knowledge' (*epistēmē*, *phronēsis*) and 'wisdom' (*sophia*), see Fine 2008, 52–55 and Benson 2000, 10, which contain other references. There is reason to think that here in the *Phaedrus* Socrates denies the possibility of even partial knowledge of Forms; see esp. Trivigno 2009, 181n.40.
83. 23b2–4. Quite a few scholars believe that the *Apology* alludes to the traditional view—e.g., Reeve (2013, ch. 1) and Rowe (2007, 73–78). Fine (2008, 77–85) and Scott (2005, 90) express doubt.
84. Commentators such as McPherran (1996, 294) and Kraut (1984, 248n.8, 290) have held that the traditional view underlies *Protagoras* 319e1–320b5 and *Meno* 89d6–96c10. Weiss (2001, 4, 8; 1994, 274) sees the traditional view throughout the *Meno* and finds traces of it in the *Euthyphro*. Consider also Reeve (2013, 13) on *Ion* 534b7–d4; Penner and Rowe (2005, 117, 147 with 147n.132 and 312n.36) on *Lysis* 220d5–6 and *Symposium* 203e–204a; Rowe (1998, 251, 404n.46) on *Laws* 711d and 875a–e; Sedley (1996, 99 with 99n.45) on *Theaetetus* 176b; Nightingale (1995, 169n.75) on *Phaedrus* 262d and 274a–b. Scott (2005, 90) may be right that the evidence is inconclusive regarding whether Socrates thinks knowledge is attainable. To nearly all the passages that suggest the traditional view, other passages stand opposed, and often it is difficult to see which passages should determine our interpretation and which should be determined by it; contrast Forster 2006, 19 with Benson 2000, 183 on *Euthyphro* 15c11–12, and Rowe 2007, 223 with Benson 2000, 182n.69 on *Lysis* 218a2–4.
85. Even if you had your own reasons for rejecting the view, you still might wonder what *his* reasons were, particularly if you respected him. You could wonder this even as an Athenian living amid optimism and excitement

about innovation or as an intellectual dissatisfied with handed-down stories about the gods. (For this reason, incidentally, and given my comments on the *Phaedo* in the following text, I need not say that Plato's target audience included non-intellectuals; I take no position at all on who the target audience was.) In the *Republic*, in enjoining us to become as godlike as we can (613b1: εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ), Socrates does argue, e.g., that human beings are immortal (608d–612a). But we might be immortal and still be unable to know the Good while we are embodied. Thanks to Eric Brown for prompting me to mention this.

86. In speaking of "the body" here, he refers to sensory perception; that much is clear from passages such as 65b1–6, c5–7, d9, d11, 65e8–66a1, 66a4, 79c5. But commentators disagree about what sort of knowledge is supposed to be unattainable (see Fine 2016, 563–64 for discussion). For some, the claim is only that the *best* sort of knowledge is out of reach, a sort of "pure" knowledge pictured at 66d8 (καθαρῶς … εἴσεσθαι) and e5 (καθαρῶς γνῶναι); cf. the reference at b6–7 to *sufficiently* (ἱκανῶς) attaining the truth. For other commentators, *all* knowledge is supposed to be unattainable; on their view, Plato thinks there is no such thing as impure knowledge. One point in favor of that view is that there is no qualifier such as καθαρῶς or ἱκανῶς at 66d6–7, e1–4, e6, 67a2–6.
87. Without question, there are ways to read this part of the *Phaedo* so that it meshes with the *Republic*'s optimism; e.g., by contrasting this passage with other parts of the *Phaedo* such as 72e3–78b3 and 78b4–84b4, we can say that Socrates is just hyperbolic in it (see Gerson 2013, 163–65 and White 2006, 449n.24, which contain other references). The point is not that the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* clash with each other. Rather, the point is that, if they do not, it takes some work to see why, and puzzling over the *Phaedo* passage gives readers plenty of chance to raise the questions I just mentioned. Commentators who think Socrates is *not* exaggerating include Vasiliou (2015, 57), Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 196), Rowe (2007, 111–13), Woolf (2004, 109), and Gerson (2003, 59, 149).
88. In saying this, I can allow that the nature of the texts, what they are, is partly a function of what we know or have reason to believe about Plato the person, the culture in which he lived, and how his ancient readers received his writings.
89. Though they need to show that the aristocratic city is practicable, they may not need to show that the just city is the best practicable city: it may be fair for them just to assume it. At least, Plato may think it is fair. In the *Politics*, arguably, Aristotle just assumes that a political ideal should be rejected if it is humanly unreachable (see 1265a17–18, 1325b39). And there are decent reasons to think that such an assumption is correct; e.g., there is the idea, mentioned below (§3.6.1), that cities, by definition, are under the constraints of nature. For relevant debate within contemporary political theory, see Weber and Vallier 2017 and the works cited therein.
90. See Annas 1999, 80 and Waterfield 1993, xxi. Annas modifies her claims only somewhat in Annas 2017; see 24–25. In different ways from her, other commentators have denied that practicability is an integral concern in the *Republic*; see Schofield 2006, 239 and Brown 2000, 14. An alternative view is that Plato wavers on how important practicability is; see Annas 1981, 185–87 and Demos 1957, 166n.1. Still another view, perhaps the most common, is that ultimately Plato holds not that the aristocratic city is practicable but simply that it is approximable, in the language I use below; see Vegetti 2013, 111; Helmer 2012, 71–72, 76; Laks 2012, 29;

Zuolo 2012, 58; Marshall 2008; Morrison 2007, 234–35; Burnyeat 1999, 299–300; Klosko 1981, 380; Moline 1981, 45; White 1979, 152. For a history of issues about practicability among Plato's interpreters, see Vegetti 2013, 105–09 and Guthrie 1975, 483–86.

91. On why it is a minimum, see note 65 in §3.5.1 above.
92. See, e.g., ἄριστα ("best") at 428d3; κάλλιστα ("finest") at 430a2; Ἀγαθὴν … καὶ ὀρθήν ("good and correct") at 449a1–2; ὀρθή ("correct") at a3; ὀρθῶς ("correct") at d5; ἄριστ' ("best") at 450c9; βέλτιστα ("best") at 456c5 and c10; ἄριστα διοικεῖται ("best governed") at 462c7; ἄριστα πολιτευομένη ("best governed") at d7; ἀγαθῆς ("good") at 472d10; ἀγαθὴν τελέως ("completely good") at 501d8; ἄριστα ("best") at 520d3; ἀγαθήν ("good") at 543c8; ὀρθή ("correct") at 544a2; ἀγαθόν ("good") at 544e8; ἀρίστη ("best") at 576d5.
93. It is plain enough that the εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα at 450c8 introduces a *concessive* conditional—i.e., that Socrates' claim is that *even* if one grants that *p*, one might still doubt that *q*. See Wakker 1994, 340–41 with 340n.71.
94. E.g., Socrates says at 457d6–9, regarding two features of the aristocratic city: "I don't suppose it would be disputed that [they] are the greatest good [μέγιστον ἀγαθόν] *if they're practicable* [εἴπερ οἷόν τε]. But I suppose there would arise a great deal of dispute about whether they're practicable [δυνατόν]." See also the phrase βέλτιστα, εἴπερ δυνατά ("best, provided [that it's] practicable") at 502c2.
95. I say "ostensibly" because of the possibility that their discussion of this topic is just a means by which Plato, Socrates, or both of them address a different topic. In Plato's dialogues, on the one hand, sometimes a discussion of an overarching topic might be just a pretext for discussion of sub-topics. On the other hand, in some cases where Socrates voices arguments explicitly, the point may be to provide an additional argument indirectly, an additional argument whose premises are drawn from the explicit arguments (e.g., from the explicit arguments "*p*, *q*; therefore, *r*" and "*s*, *t*; therefore, *u*" an argument of the form "*q*, *s*; therefore, *v*"); Plato might mean for the reader to piece together the additional argument, and Socrates might mean for his listeners to piece it together sometime after his conversation with them. In fact, there might be cases where Plato, Socrates, or both want to provide an additional argument on the same topic that the explicit arguments concern; e.g., perhaps Plato, Socrates, or both mean to provide an argument about practicability that is distinct from the explicit arguments in the *Republic*. At least, someone might claim that they do. I see no evidence that either of them does, though, and I think the burden of proof is on the person who claims that one of them does.
96. Incidentally, one possibility is that the just city is neither the best practicable city nor the best conceivable city but, say, the best city that is metaphysically possible, as philosophers nowadays would put it. Note also that the best metaphysically possible city might turn out to be the same as the best practicable city. Maybe, e.g., being under the constraints of nature lets a city be better than it otherwise could be. E.g., maybe the need for food can unify a city more than it would be unified otherwise, or maybe the psychological constraints that human beings are under keep us from harming one another more than we already do. Thanks to Garrett Pendergraft for help thinking through this.
97. Among other places, the first interpretation appears in Reeve 1988, 170ff. For the second reading, see Brown 2017, §4.1.
98. See esp. 6.497c–e. Perhaps 7.540e–541b marks another substantial difference.

99. Cf. Benson 2015, 215–17 and Ferrari 2013, 135.
100. Here is why. First, part of what Socrates and his interlocutors agree at the start of Book 8 (543a1–7) is that a city will be "governed on a high level" (a2) only if it is a city in which women and children are shared. Second, this aspect of Book 8—coupled with the passage in Book 5 where Socrates and Glaucon agree (458b8) to start by discussing the *advantageousness* of sharing women and children and to consider only later whether it is *practicable*—suggests that at 471c3–e4 Glaucon is satisfied that sharing women and children is best *provided that it is practicable*: its practicability is the one remaining issue. Finally, when Glaucon presses that issue at 471c3–e4, Socrates soon agrees to try to demonstrate the practicability of sharing women and children, and he indicates that his way of trying to demonstrate it is to propose that philosophers rule (473c–d, esp. c2–4).
101. E.g., it probably is more charitable than saying that Plato expects all his readers to be duped by the switch so that they ultimately hold **AC–2** only to the approximation requirement instead of the more demanding practicability requirement. Notice, though, that my explanation is compatible with thinking that Plato expects *some* or even *most* or *almost all* readers to be duped. On a different point, note also that we may need to abide by the principle of charity even if we don't care about finding something of philosophical worth in Plato and we just want to get clear about what Plato believes, since our best hope for seeing what he means by one claim or another may be to reconstruct the line of thought that leads him to make the claim; see Glock 2008, 109–14 and Mann 2006, 395. I recognize that there are debates about the principle of charity and how far we should run with it; see Melamed 2013 and Burnyeat 2001, esp. 7.
102. See Dillon 1999, 222: "[The] question of what the dialogues are *for*, and how they were intended to fit in to the overall educational project of the Academy, must, I fear, forever escape us. And yet, of course, we should never give up trying."

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4 Would the Two Approaches Be Valuable Enough?

This chapter addresses a question that scholars in the field of Plato studies are likely to have: Even if engaging Plato my way would be Plato scholarship, would it be valuable enough compared to what scholars already do? There is a strong inclination to say that it would not. Plato studies is large and well-established; classicists and philosophers in that field teach in most of the major universities; and they get jobs, tenure, and promotion in key part for the scholarship they produce. It can seem obvious that conventional Plato scholarship must be the only sort of Plato scholarship worth doing.

I think it looks less obvious on examination, though, and in the following I will explain why. I will consider a range of reasons to value conventional Plato scholarship—reasons that have been offered and reasons that *can* be offered—and I will argue that they are less powerful than one might expect. Not only do they fail to show that conventional Plato scholarship is exclusively worthwhile: they also don't show that it is more worthwhile than the kind of work I have proposed, and remarkably, most of them don't even show that it is *as* worthwhile, given that the study of Socratic protreptic could contribute to the health of democracies and individual people in the way I have described. Most of the reasons turn out to be surprisingly weak, through no fault of the scholars who have offered many of them. Michael Frede, a foremost champion of conventional scholarship on figures like Plato, once observed that "much that gets said" on its behalf, "even if true, sounds more like a rationalization of an established practice which has become a custom."[1] He was right, and what gets said now is not much different from what was said back then. Yet it comes from scholars and others who are smart, careful, and thoughtful, so what it reveals is simply how hard the custom is to defend.

Since my focus in this chapter will be on reasons to value conventional Plato *scholarship* rather than, say, reasons to read Plato in school, considerations like the following will not be relevant:

- Reading Plato's dialogues is a good way to learn Greek.

- Studying the history of philosophy helps students develop the skills they need to reconstruct arguments and understand complicated philosophical texts.[2]
- Reading Plato can help you become more virtuous. Plato can inspire you to seek truth instead of pleasure or prestige, and he provides models of how to deliberate with other people earnestly and thoughtfully.[3]

The sorts of considerations that *are* pertinent fall into two categories. For years, a number of philosophical historiographers have offered reasons to think their work is beneficial to contemporary philosophy. It can seem that, if those reasons are strong enough, they explain the value of conventional Plato scholarship. I discuss them in the second and third sections below. The first section is about miscellaneous other reasons to value conventional Plato scholarship. In all three sections, I will address each reason individually and name some problems it has when viewed on its own, but I think all the reasons are insufficient even when taken together, and my comments should indicate why.

In this chapter, I will need to be as close to exhaustive as I can be without going overboard, and my citations in the notes will need to be fairly thorough. To keep the notes a reasonable length, I will cite mostly works from the last twenty years or so.[4] But the views considered below are representative of views expressed in previous decades, and much of what I say about the views listed below is applicable to the views I omit. If I included all the views, my responses to them would overlap too much with one another. As it is, by necessity, there will already be some overlap.

The topic of this chapter is delicate, I realize, and I broach it hesitantly, since conventional Plato scholarship matters to me a great deal. My point will hardly be that it is unimportant or indefensible, or that it needs to be justified. I just doubt that it is the only sort of Plato scholarship worth doing, and the best way to explain why is to examine the reasons to value it. Maybe the study of Socratic protreptic simply won't interest Plato scholars, of course, but I need to address the thought that it *shouldn't* interest them, because conventional work is more valuable than it is.

4.1 Miscellaneous Reasons

First, consider ten miscellaneous reasons that have been offered or can be offered for valuing conventional Plato scholarship. In listing each reason, I will comment on it briefly.

A Knowledge about Plato is intrinsically good, or worth pursuing for its own sake.[5]

This is one of the most intuitive reasons one can offer, and it has a lot of appeal. John Henry Newman is inspiring when he writes that

"knowledge is capable of being its own end." ("Such is the constitution of the human mind," he added, "that any kind of knowledge, if it really be such, is its own reward.")[6] The classical philologist A. E. Housman made similar claims, saying, for example, that the "true sanction" of "the acquisition of knowledge" is "inherent in itself." He dismissed all attempts to show that classical studies has practical utility. ("These are the fabrications of men anxious to impose their own favourite pursuits on others, or of men who are ill at ease in their conscience until they have invented some external justification for those pursuits.")[7] There is something gratifying about Housman's strategy. Pragmatic defenses of classical studies can seem to undersell and cheapen it.

But is it true that all knowledge is intrinsically valuable? There is reason to think that some knowledge is not. For example, it is hard to see the intrinsic value in knowing exactly how many grains of sand are in the jar on your desk, or in knowing that 'd' is the third letter in the 41,365th listing in the 1977 Wichita phone book.[8]

Of course, there might be something special about knowledge about Plato, something that makes *it* intrinsically valuable when knowledge about a phone book is not. But naturally, if there *is* a relevant difference, we will need to explain what it is, and it is not obvious how to do so. Plus, we would need to do more than show that knowledge about Plato is valuable in itself. We would have to argue that knowledge about Plato is valuable *enough* to make conventional approaches to Plato exclusively worthwhile or, at least, more worthwhile than the unconventional approaches I have proposed. Lots of things might be good in themselves but still not important enough to be exclusively worthwhile or even more worth pursuing than other things are.

For that matter, they might be intrinsically valuable and not even *as* worth pursuing as certain other things. At least, this is how we tend to see it. For example, even those of us who think that all historical knowledge is intrinsically valuable are prone to say that certain projects in the discipline of history would be "arrant scholasticism," in one scholar's phrase.[9] At the least, we tend to think that, all things being equal, 20th-century political history is more worth studying than the history of rhinos in 12th-century Sumatra.[10] Moreover, the different values we assign to the two are probably not *intrinsic* values, or not intrinsic values alone. Most likely, we think the one history is more *useful* to us than the other. So on the whole, our judgments about intrinsic value count for only so much.

B Much like the *Mona Lisa*, for example, Plato is a beloved part of Western culture that is worth remembering and appreciating, even if only because of how celebrated it has been; and Plato scholarship helps us preserve our memory of Plato and appreciate him.[11]

Like the previous reason, this one turns out to be less compelling than it looks at first. Consider, to start with, that probably no sort of Plato scholarship, conventional or other, will *attract* many people to Plato, and most sorts, in fact, might drive many people away. It is easy to see why E. R. Dodds once wrote that "if the love and knowledge of Greek literature ever die in this country [England], they will die of a suffocation arising from its exponents' industry,"[12] and he could have said the same thing about scholarship on Plato. Plato scholars are meticulous enough that their work is likely to look tedious and exhausting to most people. Typically, it serves just us who are already passionate about Plato.

What if we say, then, that conventional Plato scholarship helps *us* remember and appreciate him? Is helping us remember and appreciate Plato so important that there is nothing else as valuable for scholars to do? That seems doubtful because of how much Plato scholars have produced to date. To be sure, Gisela Striker is correct about the following:

> In order to engage in a serious discussion with a classical author, to find out what his views were on a given question, or whether his perspective was different from ours, it is usually not enough to read his relevant works, not even if one can read them in the original language. It is the task of historical exegesis to spell out, in contemporary language, what exactly the questions were, how the arguments were supposed to work, and what answers were being offered.[13]

In order to keep Plato alive, each generation needs to pass along not only his writings themselves but also some instructive secondary literature. And Striker is right: it helps if the secondary literature is in contemporary language. But it probably is not essential to keep adding to the secondary literature whenever language changes at all—not if, say, the point is just to be sure that the commentary is intelligible. Students of Plato today can make sense of commentaries written over a hundred years ago (for example, commentaries by George Grote, Benjamin Jowett, and Paul Shorey). For that matter, if you read Greek, there is something to glean even from *ancient* commentaries, as certain scholars lately have made a point to emphasize.[14] And the amount of commentary produced even just in the last few decades is simply immense. It is so vast and thorough that it is difficult to add to it something new.[15] To say something novel in discussing the *Republic*, for example, Plato scholars now don't just describe the tripartite psychology: they examine in extraordinary detail whether the parts of the soul are divisible, whether each part can engage in means-end reasoning, whether it holds beliefs, whether the spirited part and appetitive part are in the immortal soul as well as the embodied soul, and so forth. All of this seems important, of course. But it probably is not exclusively worthwhile or more worthwhile than various other pursuits, and there might even be

a point of diminishing returns, if the purpose is to help a handful of people remember Plato and appreciate him.

C Works such as the Platonic dialogues are "a vehicle for thinking about our human condition."[16] Contrasting ancient Greek and Roman practices with our own practices the way scholars can, provides great fodder for reflection, not only because the ancients are in many respects relatable, admirable, and worthy of emulation but also because of their often-horrific flaws.

This common view may well be correct, but it does not entail that Plato scholars must do only conventional work or even that conventional work is more worth doing or as worth doing as other sorts. As I suggested just now, there is plenty to gain from the conventional commentary that is already available.

D Conventional Plato scholarship is integral to the humanities, and the humanities are important for a range of reasons. For example, they provide "a corrective to the dominance of quantitative modes of reasoning in political life," and they answer the question "What is happiness?" with accounts that are richer, fuller, and more accurate than what economics, psychology, and other disciplines outside the humanities offer.[17]

I include this view because many authors lately have offered reasons to value the humanities,[18] and a temptation might be to try to turn those reasons into reasons to value conventional Plato scholarship. In fact, though, there is no easy translation from the one sort of reason to the other, and the view listed just above illustrates why. Though at first it can look coherent and like its own distinct thought, on examination it splinters into two sorts of reasons listed below.

Ask, for example, in what sense Plato scholarship is supposed to be "integral to the humanities." There are senses in which it plainly is not. A Proust scholar can have a productive career in the discipline of English and know virtually nothing about Plato. If the thought, then, is that *on its own* each field in the humanities has the sorts of benefits mentioned above (such as by correcting the dominance of quantitative analysis and by supplying accounts of what happiness is), then the next question is how. There are a couple most obvious ways in which a field of study might do this. For one, it might simply report to us on people in the past who thought differently from how we think (for example, people whose modes of reasoning were not quantitative and whose conceptions of happiness were unlike ours). Rather than just recording their views, it might interpret them, try to account for them, and so forth, but it would do so without trying to assess whether they are true. This description applies

to fields in the discipline of history, of course, many fields in Classics, and most or all fields of literary study. Fields in contemporary philosophy are different insofar as they assess truth-values.

Accordingly, the claim above is reducible to at least two separate ideas. One is that the strength of Plato studies is what it contributes to the study of the past. The other is that Plato studies is important for how it can help contemporary philosophy. I will address the first idea near the end of this section and the second idea in subsequent sections.

E Reading conventional scholarly commentary on Plato informs teachers about him and thereby makes them better prepared to teach courses that involve Plato.[19]

Obviously, conventional Plato scholarship is invaluable for certain teachers—namely, those in Classics and philosophy whose task is to prepare doctoral candidates to produce conventional Plato scholarship. (By analogy, biology is vital for the purpose of training future biologists.) But to keep from begging the question, we need to focus on other teachers, including those who teach undergraduates; and once we limit our scope that way, the argument from teaching turns out to be rather slender as an argument for the sorts of work that Plato scholars actually do. To be sure, there are other sorts of work they *could* do that would be suited to this argument. But nowadays, at least, Plato scholars generally do not see their field as a service industry that is meant to help teachers. ("If we did," as Rachel Barney recently said, "translation would be recognised as the historian's highest calling, and a publication with Hackett would be worth five with OUP for tenure and promotion purposes.")[20] Accordingly, the typical essay in Plato scholarship is hyper-detailed, complicated, and rather esoteric. It may be that few teachers ever read it.

More important, it is understandable if many don't. A teacher always has to prioritize: in preparing a course in any discipline, there is always too much to read and think through. And for most teachers most of the time, all things considered, the latest issue of *Phronesis* is probably helpful only up to a point. Plato himself is immensely stimulating; as Myles Burnyeat once said, "no other philosopher in history … is so good at drawing the *young* into philosophy… ."[21] (Burnyeat could have also mentioned a range of other fields besides philosophy.) Yet it is possible to drain even Plato of color, and that is probably what most teachers would do if they brought to the classroom the exactness and meticulousness that characterize most scholarly arguments and concerns. Imagine, for example, a teacher who analyzed *Republic* 1 and 2 as precisely and thoroughly as Terence Irwin does in his published work.[22] Irwin's analysis is deeply impressive and profoundly illuminating, but it is full of involutions and, for many students, could turn an otherwise exciting text into a chore. A main reason Plato is so effective is that he starts with the

most pressing, fundamental questions (for example, "Why should we bother to be good?")—questions whose urgency and importance everyone feels right away—and leads us only gradually into issues that are more abstract. Abstract philosophical issues tend to seem dry or even silly until you see how they arise out of questions that already matter to you. And the same is true of the most abstract *interpretive* issues involving texts such as Plato's: it takes a while before most students are ready to find them interesting. To grab ahold of them, most students (most people) have to work their way to them, through a long line of questions that generate other questions and still others.

For that matter, students often learn more if they work their way there for themselves, and exposing them to too much too soon can turn them into a passive audience. When, as a novice, you read Julia Annas', Jonathan Barnes', Gail Fine's, or Terence Irwin's analysis of one issue or another, you are acutely aware that they have thought about it far longer and more thoroughly than you probably ever will. Even if they seem incorrect, the task of trying to outdo them can just look overwhelming. So you tend to wait for their next move, instead of hatching ideas of your own. It might be like meeting a violin virtuoso who plays a few measures for you. Your reaction tends not to be "Say, I took some violin lessons: let me get my violin and join in." Perhaps you are scared of looking silly. More likely, you just sense that your proper place is as a spectator rather than a participant.

But it is when students participate—when they take their first shaky steps and try to defend their own interpretations—that they typically gain the most. No doubt, there is a danger that they will simply pool their ignorance: a teacher needs to inform them and steer them toward sensible conclusions. But to quote Rachel Barney again, "better that they should get some part of the way by themselves, rather than have the right reading (or a strong candidate for the right reading) handed to them on a plate."[23] This is, arguably, a Platonic point: whatever it is, there is something about thinking through an issue for yourself that does a lot to help you understand it. You need not think through the issue on your own (that is, without guidance), but it helps to engage the issue yourself.

F *Producing* scholarly commentary on Plato not only makes teachers more knowledgeable about him but also strengthens their interpretive skills so that they are better equipped to shape students to be good interpreters of texts.[24]

There is something to this thought, of course. But teachers have lots of ways to sharpen their interpretive skills. And the deeper you go into Plato (or into Kant, for example), the harder it is to remember what drew you to him in the first place and, in turn, the harder it is to bring him to life for an audience of newcomers. Similarly, the deeper you go into an

issue or figure, the harder it can be to empathize with novices so as to see what sorts of explanations will most help them. Without question, there are scholars who are exceptions to these rules. For one, there is Myles Burnyeat, who, to quote one of his colleagues, had a "peculiar ability to lecture in 'layers,' giving initiates an immediate sense of the importance and depth of ancient texts, while at the same time giving more seasoned students (often experts in the field) nuggets to take away and treasure."[25] But that sort of ability is indeed peculiar. (It probably helps also if, like Burnyeat's, your undergraduate audiences are students at Oxford and Cambridge.) So this argument from teaching, like the previous one, is not quite adequate if it is supposed to show that conventional Plato scholarship is the only kind of Plato scholarship worth doing or that it is more worth doing than other kinds.

G The ancient Greeks gave the modern world what it prizes most: democracy, individual rights, free speech, an open economy, civilian control of the military, the separation between religious authority and political authority, unbridled scientific investigation, and open dissent. Though invaluable, those things are dangerous without the safeguards that the Greeks also passed along, such as civic responsibility, philanthropy, communitarianism, middle-class egalitarianism, and a firm sense of how rough and tragic life is. Yet the latter are disappearing, and we need to reclaim and restore them. In the United States, for example, they have been replaced, disastrously, by consumerism, moral relativism, the false consolations of psychotherapy, and blind faith in progress.

When the classicists Victor Hanson and John Heath made these claims in a book first published about twenty years ago,[26] they received national attention both in Classics and in popular media. They meant, in part, to provide a reason to study ancient Greece,[27] and conceivably one could turn their view into an argument for conventional Plato scholarship. Of course, it would be odd to say that *Plato* promoted "middle-class egalitarianism," for example. But the thought might be that, regardless of whether he himself endorsed the values that we need to reclaim and restore, those values reflected "the dominant ethos" in his culture,[28] and scholars need to study the whole culture (including Plato's contribution to it) in order to understand that ethos.

Would that thought be correct? Maybe so, but I am not sure it helps here. If the goal should be to reclaim and restore the kind of safeguards that Hanson and Heath describe (safeguards such as philanthropy, communitarianism, and middle-class egalitarianism), then a lot of conventional Plato scholarship is not to the point. (Hanson and Heath might agree, incidentally. They take a dim view of many current forms of classical scholarship.) For example, there is little sense in asking whether

Plato's Forms are self-predicated, whether there are Forms for sortals, whether sensible particulars are supposed to recollect Forms to us by *resembling* Forms, or many of the other interpretive questions that Plato scholars have discussed in detail. There is a chance, perhaps, that answering questions of that sort will help in some way. But many other questions are a lot more germane.

H We need to understand Plato, because we need to understand antiquity. From the Middle Ages on, all of Western culture has been shaped by antiquity. So unless we understand antiquity, we cannot understand Western culture.[29] For example, we cannot understand Dante's *Commedia*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Picasso's works, or the 2000 movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*[30] More broadly, neither can we understand the "major concerns of modern Western life," in which case we cannot understand ourselves.[31] Plato's criticisms of democracy, for example, have molded the way all of us in the West today, democrats as well as anti-democrats, debate democracy's virtues and vices.[32] Consider also our recent issues about homeland security, issues about how far the state can legitimately go in order to protect itself against terrorist threats—in particular, to what extent should it be able to suspend its normal protocol and the freedom of its citizens? Rome faced that sort of question when Cicero opposed Catiline "the terrorist" and executed his co-conspirators without trial; and the way Rome responded has been influential ever since.[33] To be sure, though the modern world needs to be conscious of its ancient roots, not everyone must learn Latin and Greek and do the kinds of work that classicists do. But we need a critical mass of classical scholars, and we always will. Eventually, the translations produced by earlier generations are "meaningless" to later generations; for example, early-20th-century translations of Greek tragedy now are "close to unreadable" because of how much the world has changed from what it was a hundred years ago.[34] In short, if our knowledge of antiquity is to be preserved, there must be classical scholars who continually renew it.

All of this might be correct, but it is insufficient as a reason to value conventional Plato scholarship. The same is true of the following two claims:

I By helping us understand Plato better, conventional Plato scholarship can enrich Muslims' understanding of Islamic thought, Jews' understanding of Judaic thought, and Christians' understanding of Christian thought, since many Muslim figures, Jewish figures, and Christian figures were influenced by Plato.

J By helping us understand Plato better, conventional Plato scholarship can enhance our understanding of human history in general.[35]

What conventional Plato scholars try to determine is how to interpret Plato correctly by various standards. And if we want to understand human history or the role that Plato has had in it, what matters, generally, is not how Plato *should* be construed, but how over the centuries he *has* been construed. Without question, we need to have *read* Plato, and it can be good to reconstruct his arguments to some degree. But there is no need to reconstruct them to the extent that conventional Plato scholars do. Scholars in the discipline of history, for example, tend to look less at the details of Plato's writings than at the broad strokes; and for example, they focus on Neoplatonism far more than conventional Plato scholars do—fittingly, since, for centuries in the West, at least, Augustine's Neoplatonist reading of Plato was the default interpretation.

Can conventional Plato scholars, then, tell us something about the past that the discipline of history will ignore? Will they help us understand history better if, say, they discover what Plato actually meant, instead of just what he has been taken to mean? Maybe. But then, we might gain something also from the study of 12th-century rhinos. The question is *how much* we would learn about history by uncovering Plato's actual meaning. And it seems that we would learn far less about history that way than by studying how Plato has been received. Suppose we found out, for example, that everyone for millennia has utterly misinterpreted him, and imagine we were able to tell for certain and in detail what he actually believed. Still, all we would know at that point are the thoughts of one human being. So if knowing those thoughts is worth the effort, it must be because there is something special about them—for example, they are correct and philosophically profound—and not because they are part of history.

It makes sense, then, to ask how conventional Plato studies might help contemporary philosophy, by which I mean simply current philosophical efforts to gain knowledge. That is the topic of the next two sections.

4.2 Reasons Involving Contemporary Philosophy

Here are five reasons that have been offered or can be offered for valuing conventional Plato scholarship because of what it can do for contemporary philosophy. As before, I will make brief comments on each reason when I list it.

K The most important philosophical problems are profoundly complex, and it is always tempting to oversimplify them. To convince ourselves that our theories are true, we tend to ignore whatever they don't account for. Plato saw the danger and fought against it as an author, taking care to give each consideration its due and to make

> us confront the details we struggle to explain. In addressing political issues, for example, he drew attention to the complicated ways in which each part of a society is affected by the other parts. From his dialogues, we can learn the importance of being intellectually honest and thorough no matter how messy our task is. This is "the deepest thing [Plato and his Socrates] can teach us," and it is a lesson that philosophers should take to heart.[36]

This *is* an important lesson, of course. But there are lots of ways to learn it besides reading Plato and producing Plato scholarship, such that this would not be a good reason for saying that conventional Plato scholarship is exclusively worthwhile or more valuable than any alternative.

L Contemporary philosophers should try to achieve "complete understanding"—in other words, they should try to gain knowledge of "the unity of an organic whole … a complete system of truths in which each proposition occupies its place in the structure, and is therefore necessary for the system to hang together." And seeing how hard ancient philosophers worked to achieve complete understanding can motivate contemporary philosophers to try to achieve it. This "provides one of the strongest reasons for keeping ancient philosophy prominently on our academic maps," and ancient philosophy scholarship can keep it there.[37]

This goal, too, may be worthwhile, but it is not clear that contemporary philosophers need any sort of Plato scholarship in order to reach it.

M Some of Plato's arguments are successful (meaning that they warrant their conclusions).

With only a few possible exceptions, scholars today do not study Plato because they think he has successful arguments.[38] In fact, they often are concessive when they quote Jonathan Barnes:

> Plato's philosophical views are mostly false, and for the most part they are evidently false; his arguments are mostly bad, and for the most part they are evidently bad. Studying Plato will indeed make you realize how difficult philosophy is, and the study has a particular fascination and a particular pleasure. But it can also be a dispiriting business: for the most part, the student of Plato is preoccupied by a peculiar question—How and why did Plato come to entertain such exotic opinions, to advance such outré arguments?[39]

Part of the attraction of discussing Plato is defending views that are provocative and exciting but farfetched. One thinks of a line from Descartes

about the scholar who defends bygone doctrines: "The further they are from common sense the more pride he will take in them, since he will have had to use so much more skill and ingenuity in trying to render them plausible."[40] Descartes meant this observation to be unflattering, but there is no need to see it that way. It is hard enough to mount an adequate defense of a modern-day view in philosophy of mind, for example; it is all the more impressive to make a go of the Platonist view that the soul is tripartite. Generally, though, the philosophical achievement in defending Plato is simply getting him out of a jam or showing that he has more argumentative force than commentators have yet seen. Accordingly, scholars tend to make only modest claims on his behalf, such as the following:

[MARY MARGARET MACKENZIE:] Plato's penology "is philosophically very strong."[41]

[C. D. C. REEVE:] "Plato's theory of the psyche, largely coherent, supported by subtle argument, and possessed of considerable folk-psychological plausibility, is among the greatest philosophies of mind, and one from which we can still learn."[42]

[GABRIELA CARONE:] "Even if the [Platonist] thought that god is immanent to the material universe may strike us as odd, the philosophical motivation behind it is, at the very least, an intriguing one."[43]

[TERENCE IRWIN:] "Much of what [Plato] says is false, and much more is confused, vague, inconclusive, and badly defended. But I hope to show that his questions and answers, right and wrong, are not of purely historical interest, and that they raise issues in ethics which justify the effort to decide for or against his views."[44]

[ERIC BROWN:] "Don't believe the hype. Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul in *Republic* X is a fine argument. I do not mean that Plato manages to argue for his conclusion by a valid deduction from completely uncontroversial premises. (But then, when the conclusion is that the soul is immortal, do we really expect that sort of argument?) Rather, he pulls together some interesting, intelligible, non-question-begging, and typically Platonic assumptions, and he constructs a valid argument from these."[45]

A recent conference was entitled "Aristotelian Solutions to Contemporary Philosophical Problems."[46] Consider how much less likely it is that there would be a conference entitled "Platonist Solutions to Contemporary Philosophical Problems." Revealingly, when scholars claim that ancient philosophy contains solutions to contemporary philosophical problems or tools for solving them, they almost invariably go on to mention Aristotle rather than Plato.[47] In fact, to quote Myles Burnyeat again, "scholarly discussion of Plato has at times made it appear that Plato gets closer and closer to the truth—or at least to a reasonable, sane

view—the closer he approximates to Aristotle. As if Aristotle's outlook was the telos to which all previous thought was leading."[48]

N Some of Plato's successors in the history of philosophy have successful arguments, and to understand what those philosophers say, you have to understand Plato, since they formed their views in response to Plato's.

Again, the question that Plato scholars generally ask—namely, how to construe Plato correctly—is different from the question of how Descartes, or Leibniz, or Kant construed him. And the latter question is the important one if the point is to understand Descartes, Leibniz, or Kant. Plus, Descartes, for example, is easier to interpret than Plato is. Using Plato to try to understand Descartes can make Descartes unnecessarily difficult to understand. Of course, it will certainly help to have *read* Plato. But it seems unnecessary to examine him as closely as Plato scholars do.[49]

To be sure, figures such as Aristotle are different from figures like Descartes, not only because Aristotle, too, is hard to interpret, but also because of how close he was to Plato historically, philosophically, and personally, and because of how distant we are from Aristotle's culture. There might be a lot about Plato's views that is hidden from us and that Aristotle expected his readers to know,[50] so there is always a chance that scholars will unearth some buried thought of Plato's that sheds new light on what motivated Aristotle.

But I doubt this is enough to show that conventional Plato scholarship is exclusively worthwhile, or even that it is more worthwhile than the sort of scholarship I have proposed. Given how much Plato's writings have been sifted, the chance that a discovery in Plato scholarship will transform the way we see Aristotle is rather small. And all in all, we have only modest reason to think that seeing Aristotle differently would change things radically for contemporary philosophy. Given how much *Aristotle's* writings have been sifted, the fact that scholars have found good arguments in Aristotle to date is only *some* indication that they would find still more if a discovery about Plato made Aristotle look different.

O Even if philosophers in the past got things wrong, there still are ways in which philosophical historiography can benefit contemporary philosophy. And Plato scholarship can benefit contemporary philosophy in the same ways that philosophical historiography in general can.

Historiographers in philosophy have named a number of ways in which historical study might benefit contemporary philosophy. Here are ten representative proposals they have made:

a Studying the history of philosophy can save us from reinventing the wheel. For example, we can learn from mistakes that philosophers made in the past.[51]

b Similarly, though philosophers in the past ultimately drew the wrong conclusions, along the way they got some things right; and we can borrow from them vital questions, ideas, conceptions, distinctions, perspectives, and approaches to solving philosophical problems.[52]

c One of the greatest dangers when we are philosophizing is that we will be blind to the weaknesses in our arguments. So one thing we need most are formidable objections. And the history of philosophy is one of the best places to find fodder for objections, since many figures in the history of philosophy were argumentatively powerful thinkers and were guided by sensibilities that differ substantially from our own.[53]

d Many of those figures also "are good to think *with*."[54] In other words, it can be helpful not just to read them casually in search of insights or objections, or to harvest the insights or objections that scholars have gleaned from them, but to study them closely ourselves and try to reconstruct their reasoning. Especially when their conclusions are counterintuitive, we may gain a lot by piecing together the best arguments they can offer. Of course, instead of reconstructing *their* arguments, we could simply build our own arguments for their conclusions. But when our project involves interpretation, we have to work under certain constraints: each claim we ascribe to historical figures has to chime with all their other claims. So in interpreting them, we have to figure out how *they* would reason through one issue or another. And in the process of doing that, we can think of inferences, among other things, that we would not have otherwise imagined.

e Studying the history of philosophy can fruitfully reshape our doxastic inclinations even when it does not generate objections or lead us to new discoveries. We can benefit even just from seeing a range of *views* and habits of thought that differ greatly from our own and from those of our contemporaries. Much of current philosophy leans heavily on intuitions: often it is largely by virtue of them that arguments in philosophy have the evidentiary force they have.[55] Yet some of our intuitions may be just a result of living in our particular culture. The more common and familiar a view is, of course, the more we may be prone to accept it, and we may accept it too quickly. Studying the history of philosophy thus can help us much the way that traveling can: it can make the familiar seem strange and the strange seem familiar. When we have been to a foreign place and seen the customs and even eaten the foods there, life at home can look different from before (and the more foreign

the foreign place was, the more different home life can look). In other words, the experience can

> give us a certain perspective on our own lives. It can, among other things, free us of the belief that the way *we* see things is the way things *have* to be, that X is fit for human consumption but Y is not, that weeks must have seven days, that children must be raised by their own parents, etc.[56]

Much like traveling, studying the history of philosophy can prompt us to reflect on a lot in our culture that we have simply taken for granted.

f It can be instructive to see not only the differences between past philosophers and contemporary philosophers but also the similarities. Some of the assumptions that philosophers made in the past still pervade contemporary philosophy and are questionable and hidden from view. An example is the persistent assumption that primary qualities "can be both universal features of macroscopic objects and basic explanatory posits of physics." Though this assumption may have been sensible enough when it originated in early modern philosophy, it now needs to be scrutinized, since "the basic posits of recent physics do not seem to be intelligible directly in terms of features given to us in ordinary perceptual experience."[57] In pointing out where assumptions like this one come from, historiography can bring these assumptions to light and lead us to critically reflect on them.

g Similarly, if we are prone to hold a certain view, yet we find that the old arguments that originally convinced people of the truth of that view are especially frail, our confidence in that view may be productively shaken.[58]

h By the same token, in tracing the genealogies of various concepts that are now in use in contemporary philosophy, historians of philosophy can tell a "causal story" about "how the current conceptual schemes came about."[59] Though this story will not give us justification for rejecting our conceptual schemes, it may still be helpful somehow, since the way concepts were used in the past affects the way we use them now.

i Despite our efforts to be unbiased, human beings are often at the mercy of assumptions and presuppositions that not only are concealed from us but also function "at a pre-rational level."[60] Once we have studied the history of philosophy closely and, as if in a psychoanalytic vein, identified the pre-rational forces that shaped it, we may be better able to identify the (perhaps different) pre-rational forces that shape contemporary philosophy.

j Studying the variety of ways in which philosophy has been done "may help us to rethink what philosophy might become," and this is something we need to rethink, in part because "the analytic paradigm is in what many consider a crisis."[61] Further, the education that many philosophers receive can limit their ability to see beyond this paradigm. For example, if you are trained only in contemporary analytic epistemology, you might assume that truth is the main goal of *all* philosophy. Studying philosophy's history may lead you to think of other goals, such as discovering what the good life is.[62] It also may help you recover the thought that philosophy can be not just a theoretical exercise but a way of life.[63]

There are bones to pick with many of these claims. We can ask, for example (regarding reason a), how much value there is in the possibility of learning from the mistakes of past philosophers. Architecture students study successful buildings more than ones that failed, and they do so for reasons that perhaps are applicable in philosophy.[64] Further (regarding reason b), it seems to be the rare case where insights are extracted from the history of philosophy and put to use in contemporary debate.[65] And (regarding reason e) Jonathan Barnes' question is apt: "If you're an occidental philosopher and you long for something rich and strange, why on earth go to ancient Greece? Why not accompany your aunt to China?"[66]

Regardless, even if all the above claims are true and are good reasons to do scholarship on the history of philosophy in general, they are not very strong reasons to do scholarship on Plato specifically. Though many of them might be good reasons to *read* Plato, they do not show that one should examine him in as much detail as scholars do. Again, they all are reasons to study the history of philosophy for a philosophical payoff—better access to solutions to problems in contemporary philosophy, or ways of improving philosophy itself. They all say the important thing about historical study is its propaedeutic value: historical study contributes to contemporary philosophy less by solving philosophical problems itself than by molding philosophers into better inquirers, inquirers who are better conditioned and better equipped as problem-solvers. This is, at least, a plausible claim regarding the history of philosophy in general. (Consider, for example, how common it is to think that *students* can gain a lot from studying the history of philosophy.) But in Plato's case, why think the propaedeutic benefit is worth the costs in time and effort? Admittedly, there might be certain basic, indisputable lessons from Plato that can help philosophers reconceive philosophy, for example, or keep them from reinventing the wheel. One might be that it is too problematic to posit transcendent Forms. But ideas such as that one are widespread in philosophical culture, including the culture of, say, many doctoral

programs in philosophy. And if you try to glean more than the commonplace lessons from Plato, things get messy fast.[67] Virtually every detail of the relevant texts is liable to be a topic of debate with no resolution in sight. To draw competently on Plato scholarship and evaluate the claims you find in it, you yourself may have to do Plato scholarship to one degree or another. (You certainly will have to study Plato closely if you want to "think *with*" him in the way described above.)[68]

The same goes even for historical accounts that are not strictly works of Plato scholarship. Suppose, for example, that while in the middle of a project in contemporary ethics, you pause to read one of Bernard Williams' accounts involving Plato. It intrigues you, and since you are a responsible thinker, you glance at what Williams' critics have said. When you find that some disagree with him fundamentally (for that matter, when you read that "only historical research" can set you straight once Williams has misled you),[69] what are you to do? Are you to put your current project on hold, learn the relevant languages, and chase down Williams' citations? Of course, if you are already up on Plato and the other figures Williams discusses, you may already be in position to tell whether his account is accurate. But the point here is, why do Plato scholarship for a philosophical payoff? If your goal is to make headway on problems in contemporary philosophy that are vexing and heavily debated, will it help to take on interpretive problems in Plato scholarship that are vexing and heavily debated? Maybe. But *only* maybe. And Plato scholarship can quickly become a full-time job. It takes a lot of work—an awful lot if it is done only *in case* it turns out to have a philosophical payoff.

4.3 Instrumentalist Reasons and Intrinsicist Reasons

Just now in listing reasons to think that philosophical historiography can help contemporary philosophy, I drew mostly from scholars who make relatively modest claims about the importance of historiography and what it can achieve. They subscribe to what one commentator has termed *weak historicism*, the view that historiography may be useful to contemporary philosophy but is not indispensable. Bolder than weak historicism are what we can call *instrumental historicism* and *intrinsic historicism*. Instrumental historicism, the less contentious of the two, is the view that studying the past is an essential part of philosophy, though only as a means of achieving non-historical ends.[70] Intrinsic historicism is the view that philosophy, if done correctly, is ipso facto historical. (One expression of that view is Charles Taylor's claim that "philosophy and the history of philosophy are one. You cannot do the first without doing the second.")[71] Although weak historicism may be the most common of these three views, the other two views also are worth noting. If they are true, obviously, contemporary philosophers may need

conventional scholarship. So let me consider ten views that instrumentalists or intrinsicists have held.[72]

I will start with a claim that Quentin Skinner made some years ago:

k Philosophers need to study the history of philosophy in order to learn "the distinction between what is necessary and what is the product merely of our own contingent arrangements."[73]

This claim has often been quoted approvingly, and it is easy to see why, since the distinction Skinner refers to is indeed important. But there are lots of ways to appreciate that distinction besides studying the history of philosophy. One is by talking with people near you whose views differ from yours. Modern-day cultural anthropology also might be useful. So might be the sorts of fictional anthropology that Wittgenstein and Quine carried out. And psychoanalysis might open our eyes to the contingency of our core convictions.[74] So Skinner's view, in the end, does not have much force.

Next, consider a somewhat similar view advocated by Charles Taylor:

l Underlying all your thoughts and actions are assumptions you have inherited, and if you are not careful and diligent, your assumptions will hold you prisoner. The only way to liberate yourself as a philosopher is to study philosophy's past. Take, for example, an assumption that philosophers in the West have made for years—namely, that

> our awareness of the world, whether in the organized, regimented form we call science, or in the looser forms of common everyday awareness, is to be understood in terms of our forming representations—be they ideas in the mind, states of the brain, sentences we accept, or whatever—of 'external' reality. A corollary of this view is that we can construe our awareness of and understanding of each other on the same representational model, so that we can, for instance, cast light on my understanding your idiolect as you speak by describing it in terms of a *theory* that I hold about you and the meanings of your words.[75]

When Descartes endorsed this set of views, he and his audience were aware of the Platonist and Aristotelian alternatives to it, and he had to fight to displace them—fittingly, since the Cartesian model is patently false. But the more it took root in later years, the less the alternatives were understood and appreciated; and eventually, the Cartesian model came to seem like the only viable option, so that now many epistemologists are utterly beholden to it: they are unable to take any alternatives to it seriously. The only

way for them to break free is to study the history of philosophy and thereby realize that they cling to the Cartesian model simply because they are a product of that history.[76] The same sort of thing goes for a wide range of other inherited assumptions. Hence, "philosophy is inescapably historical."[77]

This view has appeal, to be sure. But there are questions to ask. One of them is why we should think that studying the past is the *only* way to break free from Descartes. It is hard to see how Taylor would reply. Perhaps he would say that the only people who have been liberated (he mentions Hegel, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty) are those who have studied the history of philosophy. One obvious problem, though, is that Wittgenstein rejected the Cartesian model, and he did so without looking very closely at the past.[78]

We can interpret Taylor differently from how I interpreted him just now. For example, we can say that, on his view, philosophers are beholden to the Cartesian model not in the sense that they are unable to take alternatives to it seriously, but in the sense that they cannot even *conceive* of alternatives unless they study the history of philosophy. It is plausible to construe Taylor this way.[79]

But it does not help, I think. Again, Wittgenstein conceived of alternatives to the Cartesian model. Of course, perhaps his circumstances were relevantly different from those of contemporary philosophers. But if so, it is not clear how. The alternate interpretation also commits Taylor to the claim that the only way to conceive of a view is to retrieve it from the past, and one problem with that claim is that it leads to a vicious regress. Even if all *our* ideas nowadays come from our predecessors, and even if our predecessors got them from *their* predecessors, and so on, someone's predecessors at some point must have conceived these ideas on their own.

So let me go on to address some other views that historiographers have held:

m Philosophy is a conversation in the sense that it centers on the exchange of arguments and counterarguments. And in order to follow the conversation, we need to understand how it developed to the point where it now is, and we need to see not just the sequence of events that led to that point (for example, that someone claimed that p and q, and someone else replied that r, and so on), but how those events are connected to one another (for example, that p was the reason for q, and that r was an objection, and so forth). Moreover, we need to grasp the conversation in order to make sense of any of the claims made within it. After all, since the significance of a philosophical claim depends on the role it plays in the conversation it is part of, we cannot come to grips with the claim without seeing its relationship to the conversation as a whole.[80]

Wittgenstein comes to mind again. He, Frege, and others were remarkably productive, despite how little contact they had with the history of philosophy. To be sure, if they had studied it more closely, perhaps they would have been even more successful, as one historiographer has pointed out.[81] But it is hard to gauge whether they would have.

Moreover, a point I made above is worth repeating here, too. Plato can be and has been interpreted in a variety of ways. To understand the conversation among philosophers who succeeded him, one needs to understand how *they* interpreted him more than how he *should* be interpreted.

n Inevitably, the way contemporary philosophers use terms needs to be clarified and justified; and it is a product of the way philosophers used terms in the past, so that clarifying and justifying it require the help of philosophical historiography. "This is most obviously so when terms like 'Kantian', 'Fregean', or 'Russellian' are in play. To use such terms is to accept a commitment to justify that use by reference to some view that Kant, Frege, or Russell, respectively, actually held at some point."[82]

Perhaps this claim is correct regarding terms like 'Kantian', 'Fregean', and 'Russellian'. But the term 'Platonism' seems different. In philosophy of mathematics, for example, 'Platonism' has an established meaning that need not reflect what Plato actually believed. (Roughly, the term in that field refers to the view that there are abstract mathematical objects whose existence does not depend on human cultures or institutions.) Take, for example, the view, which certain interpreters have defended in recent years, that we have no way to tell which beliefs Plato actually held.[83] Even if that view is correct, it still makes sense for the term 'Platonism' to have the meanings it has in contemporary philosophy.

o Many arguments in contemporary philosophy are elimination arguments, meaning that philosophers today often defend their views by arguing that they are superior to the alternatives. In order to make their elimination arguments strong enough, contemporary philosophers need to be aware of the alternatives in the history of philosophy, in case those alternatives pose a threat to their arguments. And in order to see what the alternatives are, they need to interpret historical figures correctly.[84]

If this view is true, the danger is that contemporary philosophy can never get off the ground. Confirming that you are interpreting historical figures correctly takes a great deal of time and work. It requires that you carry out projects in Kant scholarship, Plato scholarship, Zeno scholarship, and a nearly endless string of other sorts of scholarship. If contemporary philosophers had to take on the full range of projects in

historiography, they might never return to their projects in contemporary philosophy. They could not simply rely on historiographers to tell them what the correct interpretations are, because there are conflicting interpretations of Aristotle, Carneades, Plato, Kant, Hume, Spinoza, Leibniz, and many other historical figures, including even Zeno.[85] Contemporary philosophers themselves would have to arbitrate among these interpretations—and all just *in case* some historical figure turned out to pose a threat to their argument.

Maybe I am misinterpreting the view: perhaps the view is not that contemporary philosophers must navigate the interpretive issues, but that there need to be historiographers who someday can settle those issues and report their conclusions to contemporary philosophy. One problem, though, is how slim the chances are that historiographers will reach a consensus across the board.

> p In doing philosophy, you have to respond to claims that other people have made. And naturally, your interlocutors will always have made their claims in the past rather than the present. So in doing philosophy, you have to interpret and evaluate what has come before you. And it is arbitrary to regard some of it as contemporary and the rest, instead, as history.[86]

This view trades on what contemporary philosophers would call a vagueness problem. For an example of a vagueness problem, ask when it is morally permissible for someone above the age of consent to have sex with someone underage. Whereas sex between an 83-year-old and a 15-year-old seems condemnable, sex between a 19-year-old and a 17-year-old can seem okay. But if the age of consent is supposed to be 18, why is the one case morally different from the other? In short, the vagueness has to do with how difficult it is to tell where to draw the line in cases involving the age of consent.

Another vagueness problem is that it is difficult to tell where to draw the line between contemporary philosophy and the history of philosophy. But the distance between Plato and philosophers nowadays is akin to the distance between an 83-year-old and a 15-year-old. Our relation to Plato's *Republic*, for example, is considerably different from our relation to articles in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. One reason has to do with how central the *Republic* is to many curricula today and how deeply and carefully it has been studied at this point.

Consider, then, another line of thought, which I draw from the philosopher Robert Brandom:

> q One of philosophy's tasks is to explicate philosophical concepts, and all concepts are historical artifacts: they have the content they have because of the uses that human practices have given

> them over time. So in order to explicate a concept, one must uncover its history; and in the case of philosophical concepts, the relevant history is the history of philosophy. Moreover, all statements (not just ethical statements) are expressions of attitudes or emotions, rather than expressions of belief. Accordingly, philosophy centers on self-expression. But human expressions need to be proper, and the measure of whether our expressions are proper is whether they seem to our audience to be about the right concepts. When we are doing philosophy or aspiring to do it, our audience consists of philosophers, and philosophers will think our expressions are about the right concepts only if they think our expressions are in synch with the tradition that defines philosophy. Being in a tradition amounts to showing that you are in it and, in turn, being recognized as a member of it. Thus, we who aspire to do philosophy need to know our tradition so that we can appeal to it in ways that testify to our membership in it.[87]

Perhaps this is good reason to think that historiography is important to philosophy, but if we accept these views, the question then becomes how worthwhile *philosophy* is. Brandom reconceives philosophy, scales it down, so that it is quite different from what many philosophers have taken it to be. Traditional brands of philosophy can tackle questions such as whether there is a transcendent God or a Platonic Form of the Good and which human actions and political structures are good or right in some objective sense (even a Kantian sense). Questions like those clearly have major implications for what human life is to be. For that matter, so does the question of whether logical positivism is correct, at least because, if it is, then there is no sense in trying to answer the sorts of questions I just mentioned. The same is true if Brandom is correct, so one significant task for traditional sorts of philosophy is to figure out whether he is.

But if the answer turns out to be "yes," then philosophy shrinks. Brandom's sort of philosophy is simply a venue for self-expression; it helps philosophers get a handle on the socially constructed concepts they use in doing philosophy; and much like Richard Rorty's program of redescription, it changes philosophers' vocabularies and, in turn, their habits. (Presumably, it will not affect other people's vocabularies. You need a firm grasp of logic in order to achieve the sort of semantic self-consciousness that Brandom wants.) At most, Brandomian philosophy is enjoyable for philosophers (it brings "substantial satisfaction," in Brandom's phrase) and is a kind of personal therapy for them, as Rorty might put it.[88] Yet there are alternative therapies that, for one thing, are much less expensive.

It seems better, thus, to set Brandom's views aside. So let me turn to the last three sets of claims I will discuss, all of which are ascribable

to Alasdair MacIntyre. The point I will make is that, although these claims might be correct, it would be misguided to see them as a defense of conventional Plato scholarship. I will discuss them at some length as a way to illustrate why a number of instrumentalist claims and intrinsicist claims are ultimately irrelevant here.

r The way to figure out how to act rightly is not to apply abstract moral principles in the style of Kant, or to calculate the consequences of one's actions in the way prescribed by Bentham or Mill, but to emulate people who have mastered a certain tradition of practical rationality and, thereby, to develop a sense of how to live. So we need people who have mastered this tradition. Mastering it requires "finding a place for oneself as a character in" the historical narrative it is bound up with; and to find your place in the narrative, you need to know the history it involves.[89] Central to that history are Aristotle and a range of other thinkers he influenced; and in order to understand them, you need to understand how Plato has influenced them. The legacy of Plato's *Republic*, most notably, is "not a doctrine, but a dilemma,"[90] which takes the following form: either we can give an account that provides the *telos* of moral inquiry and explains its subject matter, as Plato hoped in referring to the Form of the Good, or we are left to grapple for power and prestige in the way characterized by the ancient Greek Sophists. Aristotle's moral and political philosophy needs to be understood as a response and solution to the problem posed by that dilemma. His great discovery is that we need not posit the Form of the Good in order to shore up moral inquiry: we can explain everything we need to explain by analyzing the nature of human beings and life in the *polis*.[91]

Supposing this view is correct, what matters is what *Aristotle* took the importance of Plato to be, and the main way to find the answer, presumably, is not to study Plato but to study Aristotle. Of course, to understand Aristotle's writings it helps to be familiar with Plato's. But why pore over Plato's writings as painstakingly as Plato scholars do if the point is just to see how Aristotle construed Plato? Most of what is in the Platonic corpus is open to a variety of interpretations.[92] If we use the corpus itself as our guide to what Aristotle drew from it, we will need to say that what Aristotle drew from it is one of the few things about it that is just obvious. And if that is the part of Plato that matters, there is no need to go to the lengths that Plato scholars go to.

s We evaluate arguments by two sorts of standards. First, we have basic norms of reason-giving such as the law of non-contradiction

that are applicable always and everywhere. Ineluctably, we also weigh arguments by standards we inherit from our tradition, whichever tradition we are part of by virtue of our social or cultural context. And just as there are and have been various societies and cultures, there are and have been various traditions, and the standards we inherit from our tradition can conflict with other traditions' standards. If we are ever to vindicate the conclusions we reach, we have to confirm that our tradition is epistemically superior to other conflicting traditions, including past traditions. Yet we cannot resolve conflicts among traditions just by means of the basic norms of reason-giving such as the law of non-contradiction. Our only option is to show that our tradition, from its standpoint, can explain the successes and failures of other traditions better than they, from their perspectives, can explain ours.[93] This is, for example, how Newtonian physics can prove to be superior to medieval attempts at natural science: from the standpoint of Newtonian physics, we can explain why medieval thinkers were intellectually frustrated—in other words, why their theories had problems that counted as problems by their own lights.[94] This is also how Aquinas is able to show that the Aristotelian tradition is preferable to the Augustinian tradition. He demonstrates that the Aristotelian tradition can explain the limitations of the Augustinian tradition better than the Augustinian tradition can explain the limitations of the Aristotelian tradition:

> An Aristotelian, for example, acknowledges that the will plays an important role in human action, so he can explain what led the Augustinian to make the will the centerpiece of his practical philosophy. By contrast, an Augustinian does not attach a similar degree of importance to the process of practical deliberation as described by Aristotle. He therefore cannot explain why the Aristotelian tradition could have been drawn to the view that human action originates in a certain type of practical deliberation.[95]

If we are to vindicate our views, we have to follow Aquinas: we have to respond to past thinkers and show why our tradition is preferable to theirs.

Anyone who tries to rationally vindicate a view in the way pictured here is, on MacIntyre's terms, part of a tradition of which Plato is the forefather (for example, the Aristotelian tradition or the Augustinian tradition). If you are part of that tradition, you have inherited from him the dilemma mentioned above—the choice between trying to shore up moral inquiry and conceding to the Sophists that might makes right—and you

have also inherited the idea that the way to shore up moral inquiry is to posit the Form of the Good. Positing the Form of the Good is, of course, problematic. But your only option is to find some alternative way to legitimize moral inquiry (as, for example, both Aristotle and Augustine tried to do) or give up on it altogether: either you legitimize it or you must capitulate to the Sophists—that much is clear, MacIntyre suggests.[96] So he evidently would say that, if there is anything in Plato worth fighting, it is Plato's fear that the only means of legitimizing moral inquiry is the Form of the Good. And scholarship on Plato will not help you much as you wage that fight and try to assess how successful it is. If you value historical study and want to know whether there is a workable alternative to the Form of the Good, you are better off reading Aristotle and Plato's other successors than analyzing Plato as carefully as Plato scholars do. Even if, say, the *Republic* contained an argument for the claim that no one can find a workable alternative to Platonist metaphysics, the main test of whether someone *can* would still be whether someone has.[97]

t If we are to accept the above views about how to figure out the way to live and how to arbitrate among traditions, we need the sort of historical narratives that MacIntyre offers in his *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.

One recent commentator, Robert Piercey, not only ascribes this view to MacIntyre but also endorses it.[98] Picking up where Piercey leaves off, someone could say that since projects such as MacIntyre's are important, so is conventional Plato scholarship because of what it can contribute to them.

On the whole, though, conventional Plato scholarship seems more likely to drag MacIntyre down than to help him.[99] The reason has to do with the sort of activity he is engaged in. Piercey calls it "doing philosophy historically" and says it is distinct not only from historiography as such but also from most philosophy. According to Piercey, one way it differs from them is that it focuses not on *theories*, which are "specific, detailed answers to specific philosophical questions," but on *pictures*, which are "dispositions to approach philosophical problems in certain characteristic ways."[100] Its main tool is not deductive or inductive arguments but narratives that compel our assent because they "sound right."[101] When it changes the way we view philosophers in the past, it changes what we see them *as*: we come to see them under a different aspect, much as we might come to see the famous drawing by Jastrow as a rabbit instead of a duck.[102]

Regardless of whether Piercey is correct across the board, there is at least something to what he says. For example, he seems right about *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*:

> The particular claims it makes about individual thinkers are inseparable from the larger story [that it tells]. If we assess one of these

> claims on its own—for example, the claim that Aristotle is Plato's heir to a much greater degree than is usually realized—then we will miss much of its force.[103]

Historiographers' writings do not cover as much ground as MacIntyre's must; they do not move as quickly among arguments, figures, and events in the history of philosophy, and they do not generalize as broadly, as MacIntyre has to. Instead, they linger on details. As a result, they cultivate habits of thought that can keep MacIntyre's narratives from being compelling.[104] It might be like a linguist who does not laugh at a pun that other people find funny: sometimes when you have thought too much about what a joke is about, you get bogged down in details and miss the humor. It is not that the joke offends you; you just ask too many questions about it. ("What *kind* of chicken crossed the road?" "Is it an *orthodox* rabbi who entered the bar?")

This is not to say that MacIntyre is unserious; neither do I think historiographers are flatfooted or over-particular. My question is just how well the two are suited for each other. Answering this question is difficult because of how hard it is to characterize the approach that MacIntyre takes; it would be difficult to show beyond doubt that Piercey or I have the correct account of it. With readers who are familiar with MacIntyre's work, I am asking simply what the likelihoods are. It seems obvious enough that meticulousness can get in the way of MacIntyre's large and sweeping project; and if it can, conventional scholarship seems more likely to hinder than to help someone who writes MacIntyrean narratives.[105] After all, there is only a chance that historiography will help them at all—only a chance that, from reading about the finer details of Plato, they will get ideas about general trends in the history of philosophy.

The same point can be made about certain authors whom Piercey does not mention, such as Michel Foucault and perhaps even Pierre Hadot, and there is something similar to say about others whom Piercey does discuss, such as Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida.[106] Understandably, Piercey cautions that when we watch Heidegger "do philosophy historically," we should not hold him to the same standards by which we judge historiographers; for example, we should not "expect Heidegger to give a correct description of what *The Republic* 'really says.'"[107] Either Piercey is right to suggest that there is no such thing as what a text really says, or it is doubtful whether authors such as Heidegger are really talking about a Platonic text: their essays may be poetic performances that strictly *mention* Plato—much as, say, a jazz musician sometimes "quotes" a familiar melody without quite *playing* it, and much as, when we mention the word 'dog' without *using* it, the sentence we utter does not concern

a canine. In either case, it seems safe to say that conventional Plato scholarship is dispensable.

4.4 Conclusion

Is conventional Plato scholarship exclusively worthwhile or more worthwhile than the sort of work I have proposed? If so, it is hard to explain why. It is hard to explain why conventional Plato scholarship is integral to the study of history, for example, or why it is so valuable for its own sake, so useful to teachers, or so vital to contemporary philosophy that there is no room for scholars to do another sort of work in addition to this kind. If, say, we want to understand Plato's role in history, the crucial question is not how to interpret Plato correctly but how various figures in history interpreted him. And if one hopes to solve problems in contemporary philosophy, taking on problems in Plato studies may be more distracting than anything else. One by one, the reasons to value conventional Plato scholarship, or at least to value it exclusively, turn out to be rather slim. Conventional work on Plato still seems important, of course—in fact, profoundly important. But defending it is difficult enough that we might as well be open to alternatives to it.

Notes

1. Frede 1994, 235.
2. Related to this consideration and also not pertinent is Fraenkel's (2015) insightful account of how, in the philosophical workshops that he led amidst tensions in Jerusalem, e.g., works such as Plato's "provided both a starting point for the discussion and sufficient distance from immediate concerns" (xvi).
3. This idea appears in many essays, including Long 2014 and Schlosser 2014. And it is common to say, as Goldstein (2014, esp. 37–45) does, that Plato fosters reflection by raising philosophical questions and leaving us torn between the competing answers he presents. McCabe (2015a) adds an intriguing twist to the view.
4. Worth mentioning is that the essays quoted in §4.2 below "continue (and sometimes refer to) a well-established literature," as Hatfield (2005, 88) notes. Hatfield cites a lot of the earlier work. Gracia's (1992) and Walton's (1977) bibliographies also are extensive.
5. Historians of philosophy such as Barnes (2007b, vii–viii) and Garber (2005, 130) hold that their work has value apart from how it might benefit contemporary philosophy, and some of them, such as Marenbon (2018) and Stern-Gillet and Corrigan (2007, vii), use phrases like 'intrinsically valuable' and 'valuable in itself'. Pasnau (2012) says that studying the history of philosophy is intrinsically valuable on account of its beauty. Hitz (2020) maintains that learning is valuable for its own sake, though see note 9 below. I will ignore the complicated question of whether the notion of intrinsic value even holds together (some philosophers doubt that it does), and for simplicity I will collapse the distinction between intrinsic value and the value a thing can have for its own sake (though some say the distinction is significant).

6. Newman 1996, 78.
7. Housman 1937, 32.
8. These examples are from Brewer 2009, 295 and Roberts and Wood 2007, 156. We could say that, although *knowing* these things is not intrinsically valuable, understanding them is; but Brewer (2009, 302) seems correct that "the clearest examples of true beliefs that have no intrinsic value are beliefs about matters that do not admit of being understood."
9. Williams 2002, 7. Hitz (2020, 203–04), incidentally, seems to think along the same lines, even while holding that learning is valuable for its own sake.
10. I borrow this example from Melamed 2013, 273. On this point and the following, cf. Frede 1988, 669; 1987, x–xi and Rorty 1984, 11.
11. Cf. esp. Academy Vivarium Novum and Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici 2011, an international petition to UNESCO. The petition asks "European Governments to engage in the protection of Latin and Greek languages" and says, among other things, that works such as Plato's are part of "the intangible heritage of humanity," a heritage that "contribute [*sic*] to giving us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future."
12. This remark is dated 1943 in Dodds 1960, vi–vii and is repeated in Dodds 1978, 172.
13. Striker 1999, 17.
14. Examples include Gerson (2005) and Annas (1999).
15. Barnes (2007a, 33; 2006, 18) might say that only a little of it is any good: only work by first-rate scholars is really worth reading. But if so, then nothing will be lost if some second-rate scholars do unconventional work.
16. Pelling and Wyke 2014, vii. See vii–ix, 7–8, 63, 82, 103, 123, 143, 247; Beard 2014, 22; Cherry 2012, 13, 212–13; Haynes 2010, 5–6, 249–51; Balot 2009, 5; Cartledge 2005, 187–88, 197; Brickhouse and Smith 2004, 6; Szegedy-Maszak 2002, 105; duBois 2001, 20. See also Kershner 2013: "The most frequent prescription for 'saving the Classics' is to demonstrate how the Romans and Greeks can offer special perspective for 21st century life."
17. I quote Small 2013, 140 and then paraphrase 175. Small simply reports these claims rather than endorsing them.
18. Small (2013) cites many of the relevant works. One common claim is that the humanities cultivate intellectual skills that other disciplines do not; another is that the humanities prepare students to be good democratic citizens. The claims that emphasize what the humanities can do for students are reflected in my items E and F below.
19. Schliesser (2012) says that one reason some people value philosophical historiography in general is how it can help teachers.
20. Barney 2014. Here and just below, I borrow a lot from Barney's paper.
21. Burnyeat 2001b, 2, emphasis in the original.
22. I have in mind particularly Irwin 1995, chs. 11 and 12.
23. Barney 2014.
24. Cf. esp. Brooks 2014. Views similar to this one and the previous one also surface here and there in Schneewind 2004.
25. Scott 2007a, vi.
26. See Hanson and Heath 2001. Cf. Adler 2016, 157–59; Cowan 2001; Kopff 1999.
27. See Heath 2001, 311 and Hanson and Heath 2001, 309; 1999, 169.
28. Hanson and Heath 2001, 299.

29. See Beard 2014, 22–24, 26; 2013, 3, 8, 11–12; 2011; Pelling and Wyke 2014, 206; Aldrete and Aldrete 2012, ix; Haynes 2010, 5–6, 249–51; Cartledge 2005; Goldhill 2004. There are relevant comments also in Taplin 2008 and Kagan 2007.
30. See Beard 2014, 22 and 2013, 11.
31. Goldhill 2004, 3. See 3–8. Roochnik (2004, 1), in advocating the study of ancient philosophy, and Watson (2002, 527), in defending philosophical historiography, also emphasize the importance of self-understanding. Hume (1999, 8) does so in arguing for the value of literary history. Kohen (2014, 4, 8) makes a related claim: our categories of heroism are inherited from ancient Greek authors such as Homer and Plato, yet we have grown confused about what those categories are, and we need to study Homer and Plato in order to clarify our categories and thereby understand why we think about heroes the way we do.
32. See Goldhill 2004, 203. Goldhill (see 195, 202–03) is sympathetic to Karl Popper. So are Runciman (2010, 37–39) and, to a degree, Forti (2006): although Forti rejects "the Popperian view according to which Plato's political program is in itself a totalitarian project" (10), she sees a lot of continuity between Plato and Nazism.
33. See Beard 2014, 23.
34. Beard 2014, 23. Cf. 2013, 12–13; Allen 2010, 1–2; Grafton 2010; Szegedy-Maszak 2002, 105.
35. Kahn (2000, 190) seems to have had this in mind when he proposed that "the history of philosophy is a branch of history." Cf. Kenny 2010, ix; Sedley 2007, xvi; Frede 1987, ix. Tigerstedt (1977, 13–14) wrote that "Plato's central position in European civilization makes it difficult for a historian to evade the problem" of how to interpret him correctly.
36. Lane 2001, 137. See 10, 135–38.
37. Gallop 2004, 49, 50.
38. Cf. Sedley 2002, 41: "Most of Plato's interpreters long ago abandoned any commitment to the truth of his doctrines... ." Rowett (2018) and Gonzalez (2000) may be exceptions. Like Rowett, Roochnik (e.g., 2004, 3–6; 2003; 1996) might say that Plato has successful arguments, but Roochnik ascribes views to him that are far tamer than what most interpreters see (cf. esp. Roochnik 1996, 12); one critic even complains that Roochnik replaces "radical claims" with "mealy 'wisdom'" (Pappas 2004, 218). A bit like Roochnik, Burnyeat (2006) defends the *Republic*'s tripartite psychology by deflating it. Evans (2008) may think that Plato has a successful argument about pleasure. Woodruff (2011) affirms a certain Platonic theory of justice, but one that we do not need scholarship to discover: even casual readers of the *Republic* are familiar with it.
39. Barnes 1995, xvi; quoted in McCabe 2015a, 125 and Scott 2011, 181, among other places. Barnes immediately admits that he overstates the point somewhat. Contrast Barnes with Shorey (1982, 58): "[To Plato] alone of all the philosophers who have ever lived it was granted never to be mistaken."
40. *Discourse on Method* AT 6.10; CSM 1.115; trans. CSM.
41. Mackenzie 1981, 1–2.
42. Reeve 1988, 169.
43. Carone 2006, 6.
44. Irwin 1977, 4.
45. Brown 2001, 297–98.
46. This was a 25–26 April 2015 meeting at Indiana University – Purdue University at Fort Wayne.

47. See Antognazza 2015, 173ff.; Sorabji 2007, 382; Gill and Pellegrin 2006, xxx–xxxi; Wardy 2006, 11–12; Larrimore 2004, 56; Wood 2002, 220; Burnyeat 2001a, 56; Striker 1999, 18.
48. Burnyeat 2001b, 14.
49. Consider how casual the discussion of Plato is among Descartes commentators such as Cunning (2010, 217–18) and Cottingham (2007).
50. See, though, §3.3 above.
51. See Chappell 2009, 362; Glock 2008, 103; Garrett 2004, 56; Williamson 2004, 112; Martinich 2003, 405; Watson 2002, 527; Striker 1999, 18.
52. See Meinwald 2016, 10–11; Goldenbaum 2013, 72–73; Melamed 2013, 273; Reck 2013a, 13; Wolfsdorf 2013, 278; Burnyeat 2012, 3; Kenny 2010, ix; Chappell 2009, 362; Glock 2008, 103; Melnyk 2008, 218; Sorabji 2007, 382–83; Stern-Gillet and Corrigan 2007, vii; Sorell 2005; Garrett 2004, 56; Martinich 2003, 405–06; Brague 2002, 44; Watson 2002, 527; Striker 1999, 18. For claims about studying ancient philosophy specifically, see Barney et al. 2018; Rapp 2018, 121; Marcinkowska-Rosół 2016; Lane 2014, 3–4; Shields 2012, xii; Frede and Reis 2009, 4–5; Gerson 2009, 163–65; Brague 2002, 46; Cooper 1999, xi. For claims about studying Plato, see Rachel Barney's comments in Barney et al. 2018; Pelosi 2010, 3, 6; Miller 2005; Russell 2005, 1; Harte 2002, 6–7; Rudebusch 1999, 3.
53. See Melamed 2013, 274; Irwin 2007, 3, 9; Penner 2007, 5; Bennett 2001, 1; 1989, 67; 1984, 1.
54. Sorabji 2007, 384. Cf. 2006; Kremer 2013; Nichols 2006, 46–47, 49; Annas 2004; Brague 2002, 44; Frede 1987, xxv. Burnyeat (2001b; 2001a) and Griswold (2000, 196) refer to Plato specifically.
55. There is widespread concern about this, of course (and disagreement about whether it is true). Della Rocca (2013) echoes the concern and hopes that historiography can show us how to do philosophy better by presenting models of how it was done in the past. Cf. Della Rocca 2020, esp. chs. 7 and 11.
56. Garber 2001, 22. Other scholars besides Garber stress the importance of encountering what is foreign; see Smith 2019, vi; Perler 2018; McCabe 2015b, 30; Lane 2014, 8; Reck 2013a, 12, 13; Vermeir 2013, 64–65; Williams 2006, 259; Wood 2002, 220–21; Piaia 2001, 81; Annas 1993, 10–11. In relation to the larger point here, see also Meinwald 2016, 11; Antognazza 2015; Chappell 2014, 269; Klein 2013, 157; Moore 2012, 587–88; Davey 2011, 304; Sedley 2007, xvi; 2003, 5–6; Cottingham 2005, 31; Garrett 2004, 56; Watson 2002, 527; Tress 2000, 197.
57. I quote from Schmaltz 2013, 311, which draws from Wilson 1999, 477–78. Cf. Herzog 2018, 236–39; Domski 2013, 297, 299–300; Melamed 2013, 273; Kahn 2009, 4–5; Sedley 2003, 2–3; Watson 2002, 527; Striker 1999, 18; Annas 1993, 11.
58. This is basically what Van Dyke (2018) says, and it may be what Sorabji (2007, 383) means.
59. Vermeir 2013, 58. Cf. Milkov 2011, 24–25 and Striker 1999, 18.
60. Cottingham 2005, 39. Cf. Kidd 2014, 66; Cooper and Fosl 2009, xxiv–xxv; Garber 2003, 212–13. Cottingham's description (2005, 37–40; cf. 2009; 1998, 104–66) is sketchy; I have tried to fill in some gaps. I take it that the point is not just to realize that the pre-rational forces exist, but to gain some insight into specifically what they are. Otherwise historiography looks as if it may be superfluous. Ted Honderich, e.g., seems to reflect only on his contemporaries when he says: "Most philosophers ... for the most part are impervious to argument. There is a truth about philosophy

in this. At the bottom of philosophy are things underdescribed as commitments. They are better described as grips that the world gets on us, early" (2001, 141).

61. Garber 2005, 145, 146.
62. See Vermeir 2013, 59–60. Cf. Rutherford 2014; Domski 2013, 297, 299–300; Reck 2013a, 13; Smith 2013, 38–39; Garber 2003, 213–17; Brague 2002, 43, 47. On Della Rocca (2013), see note 55 above. Schliesser (2013) urges that historiographers can draw accounts, narratives, and myths from the history of philosophy which appeal "to the imagination" (213) and have to be "accepted on trust, or even faith" (215), but which can incite contemporary philosophers to reshape their fields productively. Piercey (2009), in discussing several figures who "do philosophy historically," says that they all "want to change our way of seeing" philosophy (42), and he mentions that his goal, too, is "to broaden our conception of what philosophy is" (8). Collobert et al. (2012, 1) present Plato as an instructive example "of overcoming the conflict" between philosophy and literature.
63. Most notable here are Pierre Hadot's writings such as Hadot 1995. Marenbon (2011) holds that even antiquated philosophy, as he calls it, is worth studying, because of what it can teach us about what philosophy is.
64. I take this point from Garber 2001, 16.
65. I paraphrase Wardy 2006, 11. Rutherford (2014) makes the same point.
66. Barnes 2011d, 21. For other concerns about reason e, see Lin 2013, 371; Nichols 2006, 44; Cottingham 2005, 31–32, 36.
67. Plus, other sorts of lessons from Plato rarely amount to much. Levin 2014, e.g., and the essays collected in Kuczewski and Polansky 2000 end up being, at most, suggestive of ways in which Plato might help us solve problems in contemporary bioethics. Similarly, Plato ultimately inspires more than he informs May's (2011) and Osborne's (1994, 219–21) accounts of love, Chappell's (2014, 295–322) version of virtue ethics (see esp. 319), and Rist's (2004) and Adams' (1999) metaethics. And when Lane (2012) contends that Plato can help us live more ecologically, her point turns out to be more modest than it can seem at first. Evidently, rather than claiming that we need to read Plato in order to think well enough about sustainability, Lane means simply that we need not discard him, as some environmentalists think we should, because he can be appropriated (Lane's word) in a way that makes him useful for ecological purposes.
68. As Sorabji (2007, 384) emphasizes. My larger point here and in the next paragraph also is similar to certain claims in Nichols 2006, 44, 49; Cottingham 2005, 31–32; Wilson 2005, 74–76; Barnes 1995, xvii. See also Wilson 1999, 462; Barnes 1995, xvii: "It may be, indeed, that the very detail and professionalism of much work in the history of philosophy today ... can tend to *discourage* 'use' of historical figures by contemporary philosophers of a certain conscientiousness, in developing their own positions" (emphasis in the original).
69. Wilson 2005, 80. This sort of claim appears in a number of places, including Lloyd 2007, 377–78 and Sorell 2005, 55. Similar claims have been made about Robert Brandom and Alasdair MacIntyre, incidentally, both of whom I discuss below.
70. I paraphrase Glock (2008, 90) and borrow his terms.
71. Taylor 1984, 17.
72. Since I am concerned only with reasons to think that philosophy needs the history of *philosophy*, I will ignore the views of authors such as Bernard Williams who hold that philosophy needs the study of the human past in general (or perhaps he means the history of *ideas*). For Williams,

philosophers must understand the history of certain concepts, concepts like "freedom," "justice," and "truthfulness," which are at the root of many contemporary philosophical problems and which have emerged not in isolated communities of philosophers but in human culture as a whole (see esp. 2002, 7). Williams' views would be relevant here only to the extent that the study of history needed conventional Plato scholarship; and see my response to reason J above.

73. Skinner 1969, 53.
74. Cf. Koopman 2010, 10; Piercey 2009, 60, 64–65; Glock 2008, 100; Nichols 2006, 39.
75. Taylor 1984, 18. Taylor's posture toward the history of philosophy reflects much of what has been called the continental tradition in philosophy (see Rosen 2007, 153) and what has been termed traditionalist philosophy (see Marconi 2011, 29–30). Larrimore (2004, 52) also sounds a lot like Taylor in saying that the history of philosophy is "indispensable" and "essential to philosophy because we find ourselves in history ... the boxes we think inside nowadays are very largely inventions of the past two centuries—although not without important debts to earlier periods [particularly the Hellenistic age]... ." And see Redding 2013.
76. I may get Taylor wrong here. Perhaps he thinks that, now that Hegel, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty have broken free from the Cartesian model, we can find our way past it just by reading their work. (This can seem to be the view in Taylor 1995, e.g.) Perhaps Taylor means that we need to study history just in order to free ourselves from *other* assumptions which, unlike the Cartesian model, have remained unquestioned. But this does not affect the gist of what I say below.
77. Taylor 1984, 17.
78. Cf. Glock 2008, 98 and Barnes 1995, xviii.
79. Glock (2008, 98–99) endorses this interpretation, and he raises several concerns, including the ones I am about to mention. For other interpretations of and pushback to Taylor, see Schneewind 2010, 85 and Nichols 2006, 41–43.
80. See Rutherford 2014. Cf. Beaney 2013b, 57; Stern-Gillet and Corrigan 2007, vii; Gill and Pellegrin 2006, xxxi; Wood 2002, 218–19.
81. See Wood 2002, 219.
82. Beaney 2013b, 57. Cf. 2013a, 232. For criticism of Yolton's (1986) similar but more extreme claims, see Nichols 2006, 40–41 and Barnes 1995, xviii.
83. See esp. Corlett 1997, 425: "We have no way to discern the actual views of either Socrates or Plato... ." Remarkably, Barnes (2011c, 30) says something similar.
84. See Hatfield 2005, 116–18; Cohen 1986, 53; Curley 1986, 38–45.
85. Of course, contemporary philosophers could use all these interpretations just as fodder for reflection: they could extract arguments from those interpretations and evaluate the arguments without trying to determine who in history actually endorsed them. But if this is what we emphasize, then our thought again is that historical study is valuable because it can introduce you to ideas that you would not have conceived on your own; and see my response to reasons a-j above.
86. I paraphrase part of Pakaluk 2006. Like Pakaluk and others, Della Rocca (2020, ch. 7) rejects the distinction between contemporary philosophy and the study of the history of philosophy. But Della Rocca does so by endorsing Parmenidean views which imply that philosophers cannot make *any* distinctions of the sort they need to make in order to form arguments

other than the ones he has offered. The effect is that, much like Robert Brandom, discussed below, Della Rocca defends the history of philosophy only by devaluing contemporary philosophy.

87. See esp. Brandom 2009; 2002; 1994. Beaney (2013b, 58–59) echoes Brandom. Thanks to Scott Aikin for helpful conversation about Brandom's views.
88. The quotation is from Brandom 2009, 153. White (2010, 839) seems correct: "It is no bad interpretation of Brandom to read him as developing a more rationalist and more rigorous version of the same general stance that Rorty used to advocate ... with Brandom's philosophers in the role that Rorty reserved for poets." Brandom's kind of philosophical therapy seems more like Rorty's than Wittgenstein's, e.g. On one plausible reading, Wittgenstein believes, like Plato, that certain people are powerfully drawn to traditional philosophical questions, but unlike Plato, he sees their urge as a disease. He wants to devise a cure, and he thinks it requires a method that uses philosophical tools. The method he hopes to develop is on par with a physician's cure for bodily ills: it is systematic and teachable and works more or less the same for anyone who is infected. By contrast, Rorty offers us a grab bag and invites us to take whatever happens to seem useful in our particular case.
89. I quote MacIntyre 1990b, 65 and, so far, mostly paraphrase Graham 2003, 18–19, 30.
90. MacIntyre 1988b, 83.
91. See MacIntyre 2007b, 223; 1994, 298; 1990a, 243, 260–61; 1988b, 69, 80, 83–145; 1988a, 26–27; 1984, 45.
92. MacIntyre (2006c, 40) himself is emphatic on this point and stresses that the evidence for interpretations of Plato must always be fairly tenuous.
93. See MacIntyre 2007a, 265–71; 2006b, 68–73; 1993; 1990a, 260–61; 1988b, 4–7, 349–88, 403; 1984, 47. As Piercey notes, "all MacIntyre can claim on behalf of his method [of arbitrating among traditions] is that it is the best one to have emerged so far. And this is all he does claim" (2009, 110, citing MacIntyre 2007a, 270 and 1988b, 361). It is famously difficult to say what MacIntyre means by 'tradition'. For suggestions, see Angier 2011, 541–43 and Gutting 1999, 87ff.
94. See esp. MacIntyre 2007a, 268; 1993, 79; 1984, 44. Cf. 2006a, 10–11, 21–23.
95. Piercey 2009, 108.
96. On all of this, see esp. MacIntyre 1990a, 243, 260–61 and 1984, 45. Cf. 1994, 298 and 1988b, 69, 83–87.
97. If someone has, of course, then someone can. MacIntyre might add that if no one has (despite how many people have tried over the centuries), then no one can. See MacIntyre 2007a, 69: "There are no such rights [sc. 'rights attaching to human beings simply *qua* human beings'], and belief in them is one with belief in witches and unicorns. ... The best reason for asserting so bluntly that there are no such rights is indeed of precisely the same type as the best reason which we possess for asserting that there are no witches and the best reason which we possess for asserting that there are no unicorns: every attempt to give good reasons for believing that there *are* such rights has failed." See 1988b, 346 for a similar argument on a different topic.
98. See Piercey 2009, 97, 111, 123–24. Piercey does not respond to Schneewind (1991, 167–68; 1983, 538).
99. Piercey considers this possibility. See 2009, 93, 95n.35, though also 41, 94n.33.

100. Piercey 2009, 21, 26. See 2, 24n.38. Cf. 2003, 792–98.
101. Piercey 2009, 38. Cf. 40, 41, 45, 112, 124, 125.
102. See Piercey 2009, 39–42.
103. Piercey 2009, 112.
104. Consider the sort of resistance MacIntyre received from scholars such as Annas (1989, 395ff.) and Baier (1985).
105. I doubt that even Knight (1998, 282) would disagree with this, even though he resists the idea that "MacIntyre's arguments rest on little more than an appeal to and an employment of narrative."
106. I have in mind the humanistic essays Hadot wrote toward the end of his career (e.g., Hadot 1995). In the same category with Foucault are, e.g., many of the schools of interpretation that Ball (2011) helpfully profiles, including the Marxian school and the psychoanalytic school. Scharff (2014) and Critchley (1999, 10) are in a different category, and they stress the importance of the history of philosophy, but they have little hope for the sorts of work that most ancient philosophy scholars do. Ameriks (2006), as he indicates (186–87n.4), is fairly similar to MacIntyre.
107. Piercey 2009, 144n.34. Barnes (2011b, 94) may have held Heidegger to that standard in saying that *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (*Plato's Doctrine of Truth*) is "wholly mistaken—its semantic thesis cannot stand, its historical thesis is based on nothing, its exegetical thesis (which is the meat and marrow of the essay) was sired by muddle on ignorance. Not only that: Heidegger's mistakes are none of them interesting or fecund—they rest either on trivial misunderstandings or on silly fantasies. ... *Plato's Doctrine* is worthless."

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5 The Two Approaches in Action

In this last chapter, I will carry out my two approaches in order to show that they can be productive. I will first discuss three conversations in some of the most widely read Platonic works: Socrates' exchange with Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and Socrates' conversations with Meno and Crito in the dialogues that are named for them. Then I will return to another familiar dialogue, the *Euthyphro*, to continue my discussion of it in the first two chapters above. In all, I will argue that Socrates does as well as possible with Thrasymachus and Meno—he picks the most promising protreptic strategies available to him—and that with Crito and Euthyphro there are ways he could do better.

For ease of statement, I will often speak in the present tense rather than the subjunctive, saying, for example, "Euthyphro is" instead of "Euthyphro would be." My emphasis, though, will be not on the fictive world of Plato's dialogues, but on how Socrates and his interlocutors might think and behave if they were real people. Similarly, I will ask not whether Plato endorses what Socrates does, but just whether *we* should find merit in it. And in gauging how sensible Socrates' strategies are, I will divert from the typical practice: I won't search the dialogues for signs that his interlocutors are responsive to him or are somehow improved.[1] One reason is that, even if he fails to draw many of them into self-examination, for example, he may do as well as one can: his task may just be difficult enough that one will rarely be successful at it (even though, like a lot else that is difficult, it is still worth trying). More important, one question I will have about Plato's dialogues is whether they are true to life. Commentators in various fields have sometimes talked as if the events in the dialogues are evidence of what will happen in the real world,[2] but it is risky to assume they are. The dialogues, after all, are fictive stories, and fictive stories sometimes tell us more about how their authors see the world than how the world really is.[3]

In the following, I will take some shortcuts in order to expedite the discussion and keep it as readable as I hope it will be. In analyzing Socrates' strategies, for example, I will look less at the details of each text than at the most memorable features of it. I also won't take

into account all the options Socrates has. In *Republic* 1, for example, one of his options is to protrepticize not only Thrasymachus but also the others who are present, such as Glaucon and Adeimantus, and in the *Euthyphro* Socrates could protrepticize any bystanders who listen in on the conversation with Euthyphro. But in analyzing Socrates' conversations with Thrasymachus, Meno, Crito, and Euthyphro, I will suppose that Socrates means to protrepticize only them. Since I will limit myself in these respects and others, my conclusions will be modest. Most notably, when I discuss Crito and Euthyphro, I will not reach final decisions about which strategies Socrates should adopt with them; instead, I will simply point to ways he could improve on the strategies he favors. In short, I will not exhaust the process described in the first two chapters above. But I hope to take it far enough to show that it can pay off.

5.1 Thrasymachus

I will start by discussing Socrates' exchange with Thrasymachus, who, of all Socrates' interlocutors in Plato's dialogues, is one of the toughest cases for protreptic, given how resistant he is to self-examination. First, I will give an overview of *Republic* 1 and 2, emphasizing parts of them that will be significant below. Then I will say what I think Socrates' strategy is and why it is the most promising one available to him.

5.1.1 *An Overview of Republic 1 and 2*

In Book 1 of the *Republic*, Socrates talks first with Cephalus and then with Polemarchus until Thrasymachus interrupts, acting enraged. Socrates, in his narration, says that Thrasymachus was "hunched up like a wild beast" and "flung himself at us as if to tear us to pieces" (336b5-6), and Socrates adds that he and Polemarchus were frightened. In part, Thrasymachus charges that Socrates is "merely striving for victory," as one commentator puts it.[4] More important, Thrasymachus complains about the fact that Socrates asks questions instead of answering them—in other words, that he only raises objections to other people's views instead of espousing views of his own and subjecting them to scrutiny (336c5-6). Thrasymachus' unhappiness about this becomes a major theme in what he goes on to say. For example, when, as usual, Socrates claims to be ignorant, Thrasymachus scoffs and says:

> Heracles! Here is that habitual irony of Socrates. I knew it, and I predicted to these fellows that you wouldn't be willing to answer, that you would be ironic and do anything rather than answer if someone asked you something. (337a4-7)

A moment later, Thrasymachus warns that Socrates will resort to his "usual trick" (εἰωθὸς διαπράξηται):

> He won't answer himself, and when someone else has answered he gets hold of the argument and refutes it. (337e1-3)

Thrasymachus sounds a similar note shortly afterward:

> Here is the wisdom of Socrates; unwilling himself to teach, he goes around learning from others and isn't even grateful to them. (338b1-4)

And for nearly two Stephanus pages (336b-338b) he tries to avoid answering questions and make Socrates answer them, though ultimately Thrasymachus buckles under pressure from Socrates' other interlocutors.

Then, remarkably, it is Thrasymachus' claims that come under review. He makes the following seven, among others:

- Justice is "nothing other than the advantage of the stronger" (meaning, evidently, that justice is merely a ruse they devise to exploit less powerful people).[5]
- Justice is "someone else's good, the advantage of the man who is stronger and rules" (343c3-4).
- Justice is a harm (βλάβη) to the one who acts justly (343c4-5), whereas injustice is "profitable and advantageous for oneself" (344c8-9).
- Petty crime, such as robbing temples, kidnapping, and housebreaking, is unjust (344b1-5), and it benefits the person who commits it, as long as no one catches them (348d7-8).
- The tyrant, who goes farther than the petty criminal and carries out "*complete* injustice" (τελεωτάτην ἀδικίαν: 344a4), is the happiest and most blessed (b5-c3).
- Injustice is a virtue, and justice is a vice (348c-e).
- One has to be a fool to act justly (348c12).

As Socrates scrutinizes these and other claims Thrasymachus makes, Thrasymachus acts cocksure that Socrates will not get the best of him (e.g., 341a-b), but in the end Socrates refutes him so decisively that Thrasymachus blushes and sweats and all but explicitly admits defeat.[6] Along the way, the conversation is fiery, in part since he calls Socrates disgusting (338d), a quibbler (340c), and a snot (343a) and, over and over, accuses him of cheating (338d, 340d, 341a, 341b). Socrates contributes his share, too, partly with biting irony and backhanded praise.

As the exchange ends and Book 2 begins, Glaucon and Adeimantus act dissatisfied with the arguments Socrates has given Thrasymachus; they

want better reasons to think justice is choice-worthy. To set the standard for Socrates to reach, Glaucon proposes to "renew Thrasymachus' argument" (358b8-c1) and, with Adeimantus' help, tries to articulate a version of it that is less extreme than Thrasymachus'. In response, Socrates treats the challenge seriously and begins the long discussion of the nature and value of justice.

5.1.2 *Thrasymachus' Anger and Claims About Justice*

There are two main features of *Republic* 1 and 2 that lead to my conclusion about what Socrates' strategy is with Thrasymachus. To explain them, I need to make some interpretive claims.

One of them should be uncontroversial. It is that Thrasymachus genuinely is angry and believes what he says about justice. One possibility, of course, is that his anger is feigned and that he denounces justice only to thwart Socrates. (Unlike interlocutors such as Euthyphro and Meno, Thrasymachus may be calculating enough to put on a show.) The chances of this seem slim, though, given a couple of considerations—namely, how irate he acts and, supposing his anger is genuine, how well it fits with what he says about justice. On the one hand, there is not much reason for him to fake being mad, especially as mad as he makes himself out to be. To be sure, it is conceivable that he means to intimidate Socrates so as to throw him off his game; but it is unlikely. Among other reasons, Thrasymachus seems familiar enough with Socrates to realize he is not very flappable. (Plus, as a war hero and the son of a stonecutter, Socrates is probably a sturdy and decent-size man. He may speak ironically when he says in narration that Thrasymachus scared him.)[7]

On the other hand, Thrasymachus, then, most likely believes his claims about justice. The reason, again, is how well they cohere with how infuriated he is: if he believes them, it makes sense that he is so angry, and otherwise it is hard to explain.[8] Consider, first, the nature of his claims. He seems to mean that, because your just action benefits someone other than you, it *cannot* at the same time benefit you.[9] This suggests that, in every interaction between two human beings, one party wins, and the other loses, meaning that the one becomes dominant and, in turn, better off than before, while the other leaves worse off. Human society is a zero-sum game—I win only if you lose—because everyone's interests conflict necessarily with everyone else's. Thus, in all interactions with other people, the only reasonable course of action is to try to overpower them and subordinate them so as to profit at their expense. Or, anyway, you should try it if you can get away with it. Like Glaucon and Adeimantus, Thrasymachus does acknowledge that injustice pays only if no one catches you in the act or you are influential enough to face no opposition.[10] So he implies that, unless you have the political power of a tyrant, the smart move is to cheat and swindle on the sly.

Ostensibly, he thinks this is what Socrates does in his conversations with Cephalus and Polemarchus,[11] and this, plus the fact that they and the others let him get away with it, is why Thrasymachus is so irritated. He resents Socrates for supposing that, even with Thrasymachus present, he can pass unnoticed and be the dominant one; and Thrasymachus is disgusted not only with Socrates but with Socrates' friends, too. (At the outset, when Thrasymachus lunges forward furiously, the second line in his statement is addressed to them: "And why do you act like fools, making way for one another?"; 336c1-2.) Thrasymachus believes that philosophical conversation is just a ruse, a means by which someone like Socrates gets to use rhetorical tricks and his interlocutors are supposed to play along: when he seems to them to outmatch their evidence with his, they are to abide by the norms of philosophical conversation and simply concede, instead of using rhetorical force of their own to overpower him. In other words, abiding by those norms is a kind of justice, as Thrasymachus views it. And he is revulsed by the thought that Socrates' friends have fallen for the scam; in his mind, it is easy to see through it, so they must be ridiculously gullible and too weak to push back. He plans to stop the charade and show them how to put Socrates in his place. Then, Thrasymachus thinks, *he* can be the dominant one and rule over both Socrates and them.

This, anyway, is what Thrasymachus suggests. Because of how well it all hangs together, I conclude that he genuinely has these sentiments. They are the first feature of the *Republic* that I mean to emphasize.

5.1.3 *Thrasymachus in Relation to Glaucon and Adeimantus*

The second feature is that Glaucon and Adeimantus make more trouble for Socrates than Thrasymachus does; at the least, they get him to work harder. One reason, perhaps, is what they contribute philosophically. Arguably, the case they make for injustice is more difficult to refute than Thrasymachus' is.[12]

But there is a more basic way in which Glaucon and Adeimantus outpace Thrasymachus, and one that is far more significant by Thrasymachus' standards. What Thrasymachus hates the most, I suggest, what chaps him more than anything else, is that Socrates presumes to ask questions instead of answering them. Thrasymachus thinks that, when you are asking questions rather than answering them, you are in better position to gain power over your interlocutors. This is why he tries to force Socrates into the role of answering, by mocking and unmasking his irony. As it turns out, though, Socrates forces *Thrasymachus* into that role. To be sure, it is when Socrates' friends nag Thrasymachus that he finally hands over his definition of justice (338a ff.), so it might seem that it is they rather than Socrates who force him. But Thrasymachus is bound to end up answering questions even if they don't intervene.

The problem, of course, is that, from the outset, he acts as if he has nothing to learn about justice. Once he takes that posture, whenever he charges that Socrates' claims of ignorance are phony, Socrates can keep insisting they are sincere and urging Thrasymachus to be his teacher, and there is no way for Thrasymachus to respond except to withdraw from the discussion or say what he thinks justice is. This is a problem for him since, in order to become dominant, he has to engage.

Yet where Thrasymachus fails, Glaucon and Adeimantus succeed: they turn the tables on Socrates so that *he* ends up propounding views while Thrasymachus (450a) and the others get to raise objections. More to the point, Glaucon and Adeimantus *force* Socrates into this position, subtly but effectively, and less with their argument about justice than the way they frame it.[13] In introducing the argument, Glaucon says he is unpersuaded by what Socrates told Thrasymachus, unpersuaded "that it is in every way better to be just than unjust" (357b1-2). Glaucon adds that he does not accept the argument he gives (and evidently he is in earnest about that), but he talks as if he finds it compelling, compelling enough that he is awfully curious what can be said against it (358c-d). If Glaucon and Adeimantus' argument were not framed thusly, Socrates could pull the same stunt as before: once the argument emerged, he could simply pick holes in it as he did with Thrasymachus' argument and then return to where he was with Polemarchus before Thrasymachus first spoke. But Glaucon dangles the perfect bait, irresistible to Socrates. If you suggest to him that you earnestly favor justice but are drawn to injustice, that you don't know how to reject it, and that his typical cross-examination won't stop you from turning toward it, he will start propounding views of his own. That is, a maneuver like Glaucon's is sure to work on Socrates, at least in any situation like the one he is in.

Moreover, Thrasymachus should have realized this, and that *his* maneuver was bound to fail. He is familiar with the sort of Socratic irony he complains about; and he believes correctly (albeit for erroneous reasons) that Socrates has a deep investment in promoting justice. So Thrasymachus simply misses the boat; and it is not only Socrates but also Glaucon and Adeimantus who show him up, since they manage to do the very thing Thrasymachus wants most to do and abjectly fails at.

5.1.4 *Socrates' Strategy*

Socrates shames Thrasymachus, of course, and a common view is that this is the main way he tries to change him. (Certain commentators can even leave the impression that it is the *only* way.)[14] I doubt that it is, though. On my view, shaming Thrasymachus is just a collateral effect of what Socrates intends, which is to make it unmistakably clear to Thrasymachus that he has failed to dominate Socrates; and making this

clear to Thrasymachus is part of a larger strategy that involves not only him but also Glaucon and Adeimantus.

It involves the two of them in the following sense: Socrates orchestrates the situation so that Glaucon and Adeimantus force him into the position of answering questions. In saying that they force him, I do not mean that they do so consciously, speaking as they do insincerely and simply to have an effect. Maybe they do, and maybe not. Regardless, Socrates knows them well enough to predict how they will react to his exchange with Thrasymachus: Socrates expects that they will sense the flaws in his arguments,[15] will want a better argument, and will ask for it in roughly the manner they do, thereby making him relent and start propounding views. His capitulation is not staged: in the relevant sense, he *has* to relent, and he would have to even if it did not serve his purposes with Thrasymachus. But Glaucon and Adeimantus do what Socrates intends, and he intends it, at least in part, for Thrasymachus' benefit.

There are two ways it is supposed to help Thrasymachus, I propose. First, it is supposed to make him think twice about Socrates' friends and, in turn, about the kind of inquiry they engage in. At the outset, Thrasymachus is sure they take part in it and let Socrates trample them just since they are chumps and are weak: they know no better and are unable to manipulate *him* instead, as Thrasymachus can. Seeing Glaucon and Adeimantus' performance is liable to give Thrasymachus pause, not only since they succeed at controlling Socrates but also because they succeed where Thrasymachus fails. Manipulating people is supposed to be Thrasymachus' forte, yet Glaucon and Adeimantus do better at it than he does, and it is not even their goal at the moment, or at least their ultimate one. So an obvious question for Thrasymachus to ask is why, then, they devote themselves not to it but to self-examination. What about this sort of inquiry has he overlooked?

Second, another obvious question is whether he *is* all that good at manipulating people. What Glaucon and Adeimantus do with Socrates is effective, but it is not particularly inventive: as I suggested, Thrasymachus should have thought of it. So although Glaucon and Adeimantus outshine him, the natural conclusion is that this is not because they show exceptional skill but because he shows the opposite. And the more he wonders whether he is inept at power games, the less likely he is to invest in them and keep thinking they are the means to happiness. Both as children and adults, we in agonistic societies prefer to play the games we are good at, all things being equal, and we tend to favor the views that favor us, the ones that cast us in the best light. No elitist thinks they belong among the plebes, and no social Darwinist believes they are one of the weak. Accordingly, it will be good if Thrasymachus contrasts himself with Glaucon and Adeimantus: it will help distance him from his bleak views about human life and, in turn, narrow the gulf between him and self-examination.

Supposing Socrates employs the strategy I have just imagined, I think he responds to Thrasymachus as well as he could. It might seem that Thrasymachus is not as perceptive as this strategy requires, that the way Glaucon and Adeimantus surpass him is too subtle for him to notice. Again, though, he is tightly focused on power relations, since he prides himself on mastering them. Because of this, he probably is attuned even to small details in them.

Another objection might involve the fact that Thrasymachus speaks before Glaucon and Adeimantus do. There is a risk, we might say, that Thrasymachus will take credit for what they do: he will figure that they would not have spoken up if he had not led the way, so Socrates' friends still are weak and foolish, just as he originally thought. But even if Glaucon and Adeimantus just mimic what Thrasymachus does, the fact remains that they do it better than he does. It will be hard for Thrasymachus to ignore that point.

It also might be objected that Thrasymachus will settle for a modest victory. The objection would be that, once Socrates takes more than eight Books of the *Republic* to subdue the challenge Glaucon and Adeimantus pose, Thrasymachus may think his mission is accomplished, since he has gotten Socrates' friends to put Socrates on the defensive. But however much Thrasymachus wants to see Socrates dethroned, far more important to him is that *he* be the dominant party in the conversation. Unless he is, he is a loser, a weak subordinant, in his interactions with the whole group; this is a direct implication of his views about justice.

Still another objection might have to do with how heated Socrates' exchange with Thrasymachus is. We might say that, in butting heads with Thrasymachus, Socrates indulges rather than diffuses Thrasymachus' love of agonism, so there is a danger that Socrates will only reinforce it. Yet there is little else to do with Thrasymachus but go head to head with him, since, unless you do, he will just assume you are weak, and in turn, he will dismiss you.[16]

Overall, then, Socrates does well: his strategy with Thrasymachus is the most promising one available. Of course, it is unlikely to make immediate improvement. After his exchange with Socrates, Thrasymachus will be prone to pout and sulk for a while, as he does in Books 2 through 10 of the *Republic*. But Socrates takes him as far as one could ask: by creating room for doubt in him, he brings him a step closer to self-examination, even if there is still an exceedingly long way to go.

5.2 Meno

I shift now to Socrates' conversation with Meno, a young man from Thessaly who, in the *Meno*, is staying with the wealthy Anytus while visiting Socrates' Athens. Meno is a colorful character, and although he is not as tough a case as Thrasymachus, he does present challenges.

My thesis in this section will be the same as in the previous: I will argue that the strategy Socrates employs is the most promising one available to him. But the order of discussion will be somewhat different here from in the previous section. Instead of describing Socrates' strategy all at once and then evaluating it at the end, I will consider it piece by piece and evaluate each piece along the way. I first will summarize the parts of the *Meno* that will be most important for my purposes, and then I will start discussing Socrates' strategy.

5.2.1 *An Overview of the Meno*

For ease of reference, we can divide the *Meno* into three main parts, which I will call the Refutative Phase (70a-81a), the Digressive Phase (81a-86e), and the Constructive Phase (86e-100c). The first shows Socrates in a refutative mode, the third is where he shifts to a constructive mode most overtly, and the second is a digression in between. Socrates shifts to a constructive mode in the second phase and third phase insofar as he hands Meno positive conclusions.

In the Refutative Phase, Meno claims, in effect, to know what virtue is and to know it in such a way that he can defend a definition adequately (71b ff.). But though he offers several of his favorite definitions he has heard, over and over he is unable to answer Socrates' objections to them. By the end of this phase of the conversation, Socrates perhaps has not refuted those definitions, but he clearly has refuted Meno's claim to have the sort of knowledge he says he has.[17]

In the process of refuting Meno, Socrates takes a provocative, edgy, even combative tone, and his refutations are so aggravating to Meno that eventually Meno balks. First he blames his difficulties on Socrates, accusing him of practicing sorcery (80b6). Meno says: "I think you are bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell [κατεπᾴδεις], such that I am quite perplexed" (80a2-4), and he compares Socrates to a torpedo fish that numbs everyone who goes near it. Soon thereafter, Meno also tries to derail the conversation, resorting to a maneuver that has come to be known as Meno's paradox (80d5-8). The gist of the argument in it is that inquiry is futile because we cannot seek what we know or do not know: if we know it already, we cannot seek it, and if we do not know it, we will not know what to seek.

In response, Socrates moves the dialogue into its Digressive Phase, gradually switching to a gentler, friendlier tone and offering Meno a version of the theory of recollection (81a-d), as it is called. Socrates says he has gleaned it from wise poets such as Pindar and has heard it from priests and priestesses. According to them, he claims, every human soul undergoes reincarnation; buried within the soul is knowledge of all it has seen in previous lives and in the underworld; and inquiry can

recollect this knowledge to the soul, such that inquiry is worthwhile after all. As proof of the theory of recollection, Socrates carries out a demonstration with Meno's slave-boy (82b-86b), who evidently does not understand geometry at first, but who arrives at certain truths about it when Socrates asks him a series of questions.

As the conversation then enters the Constructive Phase, Socrates offers Meno a range of additional positive theses regarding, in particular, the original question Meno poses in the dialogue, which is whether virtue is teachable. In the Constructive Phase, as in the Digressive Phase, Meno is persuaded (see, e.g., 86b5, c3, 100b1); he changes from annoyed to enthusiastic and apparently starts to get a feel for philosophy, even saying a couple of times that there are certain things he *wonders* about (θαυμάζω: 96d2, 97c11). Anytus, though, Meno's host, arrives near the start of this phase to witness and take part in the conversation, and he is unhappy with much of what Socrates says. In fact, Anytus acts incensed and may be even angrier than he appears, since later, in Plato's *Apology* (23e), he is one of the accusers who bring Socrates to trial.

5.2.2 *Socrates' Diversion in the Refutative Phase*

My focus, to start with, will be the tone in which Socrates delivers his refutations. I will argue that his antagonism serves an important purpose.

First, I should note that, because of what drives Meno, Socrates plainly is right to refute him. Meno's pastime is dazzling people with fancy speeches. He enjoys speaking before crowds, as he puts it (80b3), and he is anxious to perform well even in private conversation. What he hopes to do, in whatever venue, is impress others by giving "bold and grand answer[s]" to interesting questions "as experts are likely to do" (70b6-c1). As a result, he is always on the hunt for exotic ideas that have appeal; Meno is someone who shops around for cool things to say.[18] This is evident even in his opening question at the start of the dialogue: "Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught?" (70a1-2). Whether virtue is teachable is a hot question in Meno's day, and Sophists, like pundits, each have their own answer prepared. Meno assumes that so does Socrates, and Meno wants to hear Socrates' answer so that Meno can make it his own if it seems marketable. In short, he approaches Socrates as if Socrates were Gorgias, a Sophist whom Meno has studied under,[19] and Meno is after the wrong thing. He wants splashy *logoi* rather than ones that are defensible, and he sees no value in seeking the latter. Socrates does well, then, to show him that sometimes splashy ideas look empty on examination.

However, when you refute someone in protrepticizing them, there are dangers to guard against. The following three are the most notable:

- Though the person will accept that they have been refuted, they will give up on self-examination or vigorous inquiry in general. They will decide it is too difficult in the sense that they are not equipped to succeed at it or, perhaps, that no one is well enough equipped.
- The person will accept that they have been refuted and will be enthralled with reasoning and other tools of inquiry, yet not as means of finding knowledge but just as weapons for gaining power or prestige.
- Though it is clear that the person has been refuted, they will, through self-deception or wishful thinking, convince themselves that they have not been.[20] They will decide that somehow, in a way they cannot identify, their interlocutor has outfoxed them with nothing more than a clever trick.

Plato himself points to these dangers—the first in the *Meno* (80d5-8), the second at one point in the *Republic* (539b2-8), and the third in the *Euthyphro* (11c9-d2)—and he does so with good reason. Nearly anyone who has taught introductory courses in philosophy, for example, has seen students react to refutation in the sorts of ways I just described.

Happily, the second danger is not very pressing in Meno's particular case: because of who Meno is, there is little chance that he will misuse the tools of *inquiry* to gain power or prestige. Though Meno is after power and prestige, he is too preoccupied with his search for speeches to hope to outwit people in dialectical exchanges, and he will be too frustrated with Socrates to want to imitate him. For Meno, a teacher is simply a source of useful speeches to appropriate (cf. 71d1-3, 73c7-8), so Socrates will only seem like a bad teacher.

But although Socrates need not worry much about the second danger where Meno is concerned, Socrates does need to keep in mind the other two dangers. And importantly, he needs to guard against the first one, in particular. The first danger is more important to avoid, since it is better for Meno to despair of Socrates than to despair of self-examination. This is why Socrates does well to take a provocative tone in the Refutative Phase. His testiness can be off-putting to many readers nowadays, but here it has a significant function. It invites Meno to think just that Socrates is a jerk, so that if Meno blames anything other than himself for his difficulties, it will only be Socrates he blames.

Taking an abrasive tone, I contend, is the most sensible tactic available to Socrates. To be sure, there are alternatives that serve the same purpose, including some that are gentler and readily come to mind, especially for us who teach college students. To keep them from giving up, for example, a teacher can act self-effacing and playfully pompous while delivering refutations, so that the natural assumption at first is that their only purpose is comedy. But a problem with this kind of approach in Meno's case is that he is already prone to dismiss refutations and will probably do so

if you let him. So Socrates' tone is doubly apt: besides prompting Meno to blame Socrates alone, it signals that Socrates' refutations are to be taken seriously.

5.2.3 *Socrates' Appeal in the Digressive Phase*

Socrates also needs to guard against the third danger: after annoying Meno, he needs some way to win him back, so that Meno will not *settle* on the thought that his difficulties are just Socrates' fault. Aptly, then, once Meno compares Socrates to a torpedo fish and deploys Meno's paradox, Socrates shifts out of his refutative mode—he quits critiquing what Meno says. Socrates could continue, since here, as elsewhere, Meno is easily refutable.[21] But when someone has clearly been refuted and denies that they have been, it is unwise to pile on more refutation.

The smarter choice is to remove the incentive that leads to wishful thinking—and to self-deception, if the classic theories of self-deception are correct. On all the classic theories, what determines whether a person will deceive themselves into holding some belief or other is simply whether there is enough inducement for them to do so—whether, at some level, they think they will gain more by holding the belief erroneously than by forming the opposite belief.[22] Take Meno, for example. If he even *sees* the evidence that he has been refuted, he will deceive himself into believing he has not been, as long as he thinks the costs of believing otherwise would be too high. He is likely to think this, before the discussion in the Digressive Phase, since at that point it will seem to him that, if he accepts the idea that he lacks the knowledge he thought he had, then what he has acquired so far from Gorgias and others is useless, such that Meno no longer gets to do what he wants most, which is to wow people with flashy and novel spiels that make him seem like an expert. But if he believes that he still will be able to do this even if he accepts that he has been refuted, he will not deceive himself about whether he has been.

And in the Digressive Phase, Socrates gives him reason to think he *will* still be able. By the end of the digression, Meno has a colorful theory to offer people, the theory of recollection, which is exotic enough to come from mysterious priests and priestesses and to involve the idea of reincarnation, and which Gorgias' other protégés in Meno's Thessaly will not have heard of, so that Meno will not be upstaged if he uses it. Even better, Socrates has provided, as proof of the theory, a lively demonstration which Meno can easily replicate with some other slave-boy. And the upshot of the theory of recollection is the value of inquiry, refutation, and the befuddlement that often comes with them, so that once Meno accepts the theory, the idea that he has been refuted will be much easier to swallow.

I say "*once* Meno accepts the theory" since he is almost bound to, as soon as he decides that it and the slave-boy demonstration have audience

appeal. What is convincing to Meno is simply what he thinks will impress other people. (Consider, for example, how he reacts to Socrates' definition of shape. When Socrates first states his definition straightforwardly but plainly, Meno rejects it; yet Meno is convinced when Socrates then says roughly the same thing in a grand way; 75b-76d.) So, incidentally, offering Meno the theory of recollection not only offsets the third danger: it also provides an extra way of guarding against the first danger, so that the bases are doubly covered. It does so because it gives Meno compelling reason to think self-examination is manageable and, in turn, worth the effort—not reason that *should* be compelling, perhaps, but reason that *will* be compelling to Meno, given his predilections.[23]

Here, too, I think, Socrates does as well as he could. Admittedly, though he avoids the immediate danger, he also creates a new one, which is that Meno will walk away affirming the value of self-examination but for a poor reason. Yet this danger is negligible, in part since Socrates gives him more than one reason. Beneath the theory of recollection is a less glitzy but levelheaded account that Socrates presents later (at 97c-98a, toward the end of the Constructive Phase), an account of the value of knowledge and, by implication, the value of all serious inquiry. If Meno pays attention, he will remember this other account, too. And then he will have a chance to reflect on which account is better.

5.2.4 *Socrates' Deferral in the Constructive Phase*

There is another danger that Socrates creates. In the Digressive Phase of the *Meno*, he simply hands Meno the theory of recollection; it does not emerge from Meno's own thoughts. Then in the Constructive Phase, Socrates feeds Meno additional views, which Meno accepts. Though Socrates asks questions there, he tends to ask only *leading* questions, and at times he does not even pose questions: he just states a position (e.g., 97d-98a). The risk in being so directive with your interlocutor is that they will never come to think for themselves.[24] How does Socrates avoid this worry?

My answer will reflect a line that many scholars have taken lately. Many have said that, in feeding views or arguments to his interlocutors, Socrates provides them not with final answers but with starting points for inquiry. There are several ways he may do this. At times, for example, when he talks with people who are enthusiastic about philosophy but only novices at it, he may point them toward new issues to inquire about, issues that are meatier than the ones they have already explored. He may do this by offering arguments whose conclusions "prefigure the way that 'hypotheses' function in modern science," as one commentator puts it, "namely as the basis for research programmes which are designed to test, and if possible to disprove, the hypotheses through systematic enquiry."[25] At other times, with interlocutors who are new to

philosophy and not yet invested in it, Socrates may present an argument that provokes them—for example, an argument which is counterintuitive enough that they will want to combat it—or he may entice them with an argument that is compelling but not quite adequate, so that they will try to improve on it.[26] Sometimes he also may voice a view when his interlocutors are too ashamed to admit they hold it;[27] or through leading questions (or even declarative statements), he may elicit his interlocutors' beliefs so that he then can cast doubt on them. As I noted in Chapter 3, Sandra Peterson says that Socrates does the latter even in dialogues such as the *Republic* where he has relatively advanced interlocutors. On her interpretation, the *Republic* shows just the first part of a larger conversation between Socrates and his interlocutors—namely, the part where he simply elicits their views. If the discussion continues past the point where the *Republic* ends, Socrates will scrutinize those views once he has the chance. In the part of the conversation shown in the *Republic*, in other words, he hands his interlocutors a bulky argument just to set them up for a fall.

Even if that interpretation is incorrect about the *Republic*, something similar is clearly true about the *Meno*. In the Constructive Phase, especially, Socrates sets Meno up for a fall. As Socrates hands over argument after argument and Meno happily accepts them, Anytus grows angrier and angrier and more and more incredulous. At the end, Socrates leaves: *he* will not raise objections to the views Meno now has in hand. But Anytus will if he has the chance. And evidently, Socrates is counting on this. Once Meno is fully persuaded and Socrates is set to leave, he tells Meno on his way out: "You convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you yourself have been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable" (100b7-c1).

In the *Meno*, of course, Socrates does not get Meno to formulate arguments of his own, and Meno probably does not think very thoroughly before accepting the arguments that Socrates hands him. But Socrates has to start somewhere. Most likely, Meno is not willing yet to craft arguments for himself: Socrates probably has to hand him arguments if he is to hold his attention. And although in the dialogue itself Meno is quick to accept the arguments Socrates gives him, he will have to think more seriously soon, once he talks with Anytus. Given how new to philosophy Meno is, he will be ill-equipped to answer Anytus' objections, even if they are weak; so although Meno has these arguments in his grip for now, he will have to struggle to hold onto them, and they will probably slip from his fingers before long. Plus, even if he goes on accepting them indefinitely, not all is lost, since some of the arguments, such as the one about the value of knowledge (97c-98a), direct Meno toward further inquiry, including self-examination.

An objection might be that his exchange with Anytus will be too disheartening for him: he may despair of self-examination once Anytus

dismantles him. To guard against this danger, Socrates could warn Meno before leaving that Anytus will be a tough critic, and reassure Meno that there are answers to the objections that Anytus will raise. The problem with doing that, though, is that it would encourage Meno to return to Socrates and keep relying on him for solutions, and this would defeat the purpose of leaving Anytus to do his work with Meno. So the better move is to offer no reassurance, just as Socrates does.

Across the board, then, Socrates has a savvy and promising strategy. With Meno, of course, as with Thrasymachus, progress will be slow, if it comes at all. But Socrates leaves Meno better off than before. At the end, Meno is more likely to examine himself, and as likely as one could hope.

5.3 Crito

In this section, I will consider the conversation in the *Crito*, interpreting it in light of the other Platonic dialogues in which the character Crito appears: the *Apology*, *Euthydemus*, and *Phaedo*.[28] Here, first, is a bit about him and the dialogue that bears his name.

Crito is a successful businessman who is anxious to make a lot of money so that his sons will be well off (*Euthydemus* 304c3-4, 306e2). He is a long-time friend of Socrates' (*Crito* 43b7, 49b1-2) and is about as old as he and from the same deme (*Apology* 33d9-e1). In the *Crito*, he visits Socrates at dawn, just as Socrates wakes up, and the two of them talk with each other apparently with no one else present. At the start of the dialogue, Socrates has been convicted and sentenced to die, and Crito tries to convince him to let Crito and others help him avoid execution by escaping prison. In response, Socrates presents arguments for thinking he should stay where he is, and at length he articulates some of them as a speech that the Laws of Athens could give. Crito falls mostly silent at that point and at the end replies simply: "I have nothing to say, Socrates" (54d9).

Some commentators have worried that Crito becomes merely a yes-man in this stretch of the *Crito* and that the transition is implausible.[29] To me, his behavior makes sense. For reasons that will emerge, I believe his thoughts are undeveloped enough that it takes little to overwhelm him. Even more commonly, scholars have asked how to reconcile the Laws' speech in the *Crito* with what Socrates says in the *Apology*,[30] but that will not be my goal, of course. In the following, I will start by discussing Socrates' strategy with Crito and then will argue that there is a better strategy available.

5.3.1 *Crito's Tepidness Toward Self-Examination*

There are two main features of Crito that lead me to my conclusion about what Socrates' strategy is. The first is that he is not invested in self-examination. To be sure, when he is around Socrates, he talks as if it

is vital. In the *Phaedo*, for example, when Socrates tells his interlocutors to care for their souls, Crito replies: "We shall be eager to follow your advice" (115c2), and the context (e.g., b5) suggests he has often said the same sort of thing before. In the *Euthydemus*, he calls philosophy "a charming thing" (304e7-305a1) and says he loves listening to and learning from philosophical discussions (271a2-3, 304c6-7). Toward the end of the dialogue, he also exclaims to Socrates:

> Whenever I am in your company, your presence has the effect of leading me to think it madness to have taken such pains about my children in various other ways, such as marrying to make sure that they would be of noble birth on the mother's side, and making money so that they would be as well off as possible, and then to give no thought to their education. (306d6-e3)

And Crito clearly assumes that to see after his sons' education would be to direct them toward philosophy (see, e.g., 307a2).

Yet he does not follow through: there is a disparity between his expressions of enthusiasm and the way he generally acts and thinks. Instead of pursuing an education for his sons, he stays focused on making money for them; and he puts forth a feeble effort, if any, to secure an education for himself. In fact, though Crito says he loves observing philosophical discussions, at times it seems that he barely listens to the arguments he hears or does not notice their implications. In both the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, he ignores clear implications of Socrates' claims.[31] Plus, at the point when the conversation in the *Crito* occurs, Socrates and Crito have had many conversations about whether to escape, and Crito apparently has not retained what Socrates said before.[32] Evidently, this is not because Crito is dimwitted, but just because he is unmotivated to pay closer attention.[33]

I should add a bit more, particularly since it will be important later. Most revealing is what happens at the outset of the *Crito* when Crito tries to convince Socrates to escape (44b-46a). Crito first says that the loss of Socrates will be for him the loss of an invaluable friend and that, if Socrates dies as planned, many people will think less of Crito, assuming he was too stingy to fund Socrates' escape. In reply, Socrates asks why he and Crito should care what the majority think, since "the most reasonable people" (44c7) will not think less of Crito. When Crito protests that the majority can do great harm, Socrates denies that they can, and he offers a reason. In response, Crito simply concedes and replaces his original arguments with the following, none of which he develops and all of which he delivers in rapid succession:

- Although Crito and Socrates' other friends would risk punishment in helping Socrates escape, saving Socrates would be worth the risk (44e-45a).

- Helping Socrates escape would not cost Crito much money (45a-b).
- In case Socrates prefers not to use Crito's money, there are other people willing to spend theirs (45b).
- If Socrates escaped Athens, he would be welcomed in many other places (45b-c).
- It will be unjust for Socrates to give up his life when he could save it.[34]
- By simply accepting death, Socrates will betray his sons (45c-d).
- Acting justly should be important to Socrates since he has claimed throughout his life to care for virtue (45d).
- By refusing to escape, Socrates will look cowardly and unmanly, and this will be shameful (45e-46a).

What is significant about this passage is that it shows how cheap even Crito's own arguments are to him, how ready he is to trade any of them for another, while always clinging to the conclusion they share. When one of Crito's arguments does not move Socrates, it is as if Crito says: "You don't like that one? Here's another, and another, and still another," as if he has no conviction that any of them *should* persuade Socrates, only a desire that one of them will—or, as if his aim is not to show Socrates the truth, but just to persuade him by whatever means is effective. When Socrates ignores Crito's argument about losing a friend, Crito says nothing about the omission, as if to concede that, although it matters to him whether he will lose Socrates, there is no reason it should change Socrates' decision in the end.[35] More important, as soon as Socrates (44c-d) offers slight pushback to Crito's argument about his reputation, Crito shifts abruptly and tries a wholly different approach. He pelts Socrates with a range of scattershot additional arguments, the premises of which have nothing to do with Crito's original arguments about friendship and his reputation. And throughout the passage Crito speaks in a breathless manner, not, evidently, because he is emotionally overwrought (though he may be),[36] but just since he wants to convince Socrates, and wants to convince him less by means of evidence than by being emphatic. Socrates refers to Crito's "eagerness" (προθυμία, 46b1: cf. 47a1-2), but that is not my reason for describing Crito this way. His breathlessness is evident even in the fact that he repeats himself,[37] in the fact that he poses a question at one point but forges ahead before Socrates can answer (44e1-45a1), and in the insistent way he makes his statements, ending a couple of them, for example, not by waiting to see if Socrates has counter-evidence, but by pleading: "Follow my advice, and do not act differently" (45a3) and "Let me persuade you on every count, Socrates, and do not act differently" (46a7-9). Even this suggests that Crito is not very thoughtful, that he is set on persuading his listener, and that his arguments are dispensable devices made simply for that purpose.

5.3.2 *Socrates' Assessment of Crito*

Socrates surely realizes that Crito is uninvested in self-examination. It is obvious,[38] and Socrates acts as if he sees it. For example, once Crito has flung his arguments at Socrates, Socrates mostly ignores them, as if he recognizes how cheap they are to Crito. Famously, Socrates also makes a point of saying the following:

> At all times, I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me. (46b4-6).

Apparently, Socrates thinks Crito is *not* that kind of man, and Socrates' statement is shorthand, a kind of shorthand that we use even today and that I will repeat at times below. Presumably, what Socrates means, in brief, is that he (Socrates) is devoted to self-examination.

After all, unless they are akratic, *everyone* listens only to the argument that seems best to them, as I implied at the start of Chapter 1 above.[39] That is how they come to hold their beliefs and decide how to act. Supposing, for example, that Crito believes it is bad for Socrates to die, Crito has run an argument of the following form, not consciously, of course, but in effect:

1 If Socrates' death will rob me of a friend [or, for example, if it will damage my reputation], then it is bad.
2 And it will do that.
3 So it is bad.

And if, say, Crito simply acts on his desires—for example, the desire to persuade Socrates to escape—in effect, Crito reasons as follows:

1 I should always act on my strongest desire.
2 And my strongest desire is to persuade Socrates to escape.
3 So that is what I should try to do.

Self-examination, in short, is just an attempt to do well what we all inevitably do and are committed to doing well: it is an attempt to find the *best* arguments to act on, so that one is more likely to act sensibly.

Moreover, Socrates presumably sees all of this, since his typical approach to cross-examination presupposes it.[40] Often all he does in order to spur someone into reflection is show that their beliefs about how to live well are inconsistent with one another. As he must recognize, that maneuver is sure to be ineffective unless the inconsistency counts as a problem by the person's own standards and they are committed to fixing it.

5.3.3 *Crito's Friendship*

Given how well Socrates knows Crito, Socrates is probably also aware of the other feature of him I will name. It is that Crito deeply values Socrates as a friend and will hate losing him. This, too, is obvious, and commentators generally recognize it, but they sometimes underplay it. For example, some have held that, in trying to persuade Socrates to escape, Crito's main concern is protecting his own reputation.[41] By contrast, I suspect that Crito's chief motivation is friendship: Crito wants not to lose Socrates, plus Crito thinks that living would benefit Socrates himself more than dying would.

Crito calls Socrates "a friend the like of whom I shall never find again" (*Crito* 44b9) and acts accordingly. He not only attends Socrates' trial (*Apology* 33d, 38b) but also is ready to stand surety for the fine Socrates proposes during the trial (38b) and to pledge a sum of money to Athens that will spare Socrates from prison (*Phaedo* 115d). Once Socrates is in prison, Crito regularly visits him there, even when doing so costs Crito money (*Crito* 43a). He, again, is willing both to spend money and to risk punishment for helping Socrates escape (44e-45a). And in the hours before Socrates' death, he waits on him hand and foot, accompanying him, for example, while he takes his last bath (*Phaedo* 116a) and, in a way that is almost maternal, trying to quiet him (63d-e; cf. 60a6-b1, 115b1-4, 116e1-6).

Moreover, Crito clearly anguishes over the prospect of Socrates' death. At the start of the *Crito*, he acts surprised that Socrates is able to sleep, since Crito himself is "sleepless and sorrowful" (43b4). He calls Socrates' impending death a "calamity" (συμφορά: 44b8); he cries in the *Phaedo* (117d); and in the *Crito*, when he tells Socrates that the execution apparently will take place soon, Crito says that "the news is bad and hard to bear. Indeed, I would count it among the hardest" (43c7-8). As one scholar puts it, "a concern for reputation could never adequately account for the profound misery and pain that Crito experiences at this moment; only Crito's love for his friend could do that."[42]

And there is further reason to think that friendship matters more to Crito than his reputation. As he must be aware, his reputation will suffer even just from his public association with Socrates, and it would suffer even more if he helped Socrates escape. If Crito's reputation were really his ultimate concern, he would publicly distance himself from his friend. But he does not; and in the *Crito*, in fact, he urges Socrates to let him dive even deeper.[43]

5.3.4 *Socrates' Strategy*

I have highlighted two features of Crito: how uninvested he is in self-examination and how much he will hate to lose Socrates. In light of them, here is what I propose Socrates' strategy is.

I suggest that Socrates presents the Laws' speech strictly to frustrate Crito and get under his skin. To be sure, in order to tailor his remarks to Crito's present concern and ensure that Crito is invested in the conversation, Socrates frames his response to him as an attempt to persuade him of the need to stay in jail (e.g., 48e3-5). But Socrates' goal, in fact, is not to *persuade* Crito of anything, even the view that Crito should examine himself. Socrates figures that the way to persuade him would be to offer him arguments and that it would be ineffective to give him an argument for valuing arguments: Crito would take it no more seriously than he takes other arguments. Accordingly, Socrates means to draw him into self-examination not by persuading him of its importance but by instilling in him a regret: the Laws' speech is supposed to silence him in the moment but stay firmly in his memory, nagging and eating away at him. Socrates' hope is that, once he is gone and Crito intensely misses his company, Crito will lament what has happened; he will keep agonizing over the conversation in the *Crito*, wishing he had persuaded Socrates; he will search and search for what he could have said in opposition to the Laws; and in the process he will develop the habit of attending to arguments. Ideally, his reflection will even carry him into abstract issues such as what justice is, and he will come to see how they bear on his life.

There is a proviso to add, since it will be significant below. Though Socrates means to silence Crito on the topic of whether Socrates should escape, on a different topic Socrates takes measures to spark further conversation. After he has presented the Laws' speech, he says:

> The echo of these words resounds in me and makes it impossible for me to hear anything else. As far as my present beliefs go, if you speak in opposition to them, you will speak in vain. (54d5-8)

That statement is in tension with an earlier comment of Socrates' that I quoted above, a comment which, notably, he reinforces at one point in the dialogue (48c1-2):

> At all times, I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me. (46b4-6)

Socrates means to give Crito a chance to point out the tension ("But you said you're the sort of man who listens to nothing but the argument. So, what if I had an overwhelming argument to offer you now? Wouldn't it sway you?"). Socrates realizes how unlikely it is that Crito will take the bait (Crito is often inattentive), but if Crito brings up the idea of listening only to the best argument, Socrates can make that idea a topic of discussion.[44] In other words, although Socrates doesn't mean to *ensure* a response from Crito, he wants to invite one.

Otherwise, however, Socrates means to silence Crito, for the purpose I just described. Knowing Crito as well as he does, Socrates is sure that Crito will be regretful. And Socrates counts on the depth of Crito's regret to lead him to self-examination. So I propose. Naturally, there are alternative interpretations that are plausible. On one of them, for example, Socrates means for Crito to be not regretful but puzzled: the hope is that he will wonder how his view of justice can be correct given how forceful the Laws' arguments are.[45] But my worry about interpretations like that one is that they expect too much of Crito. For example, for the reasons I have indicated, I think he is not yet motivated enough on his own to be puzzled just by the Laws' arguments. I prefer my reading since it seems more charitable to Socrates.

5.3.5 *Aspirants and Culturists*

Now that I have ascribed a strategy to Socrates, let me shift gears and evaluate it.

The first thing to say is that, even if it is not ideal, it does make sense. Among other reasons, it might be true that giving Crito arguments would have little effect on him, at least if arguments are all that one offered him. Perhaps he is uninvested in self-examination not simply because he doubts its importance, but because of some deeper issue. To be sure, he probably is not akratic, by which I mean that, at the points when he is philosophically unserious, it is unlikely that he acts contrary to the beliefs he holds.[46] But maybe in those moments he engages in a kind of self-deception: maybe he believes in self-examination at one level while, at another level, convincing himself that it is less important than money-making or the like.[47] Though there is no evidence that he does this or that he even has an incentive to, we can't rule out the possibility that he does. (Self-deception *is* said to be common, at least in modern times.)[48] And obviously, if he does deceive himself in this way, it won't do much good to give him reasons to examine himself, since in that case he tends to blind himself to reasons of that sort and will probably keep doing so until he no longer has an incentive.

However, it still is possible that, at the deepest level, Crito does *not* believe in self-examination, and especially if he does not, Socrates' strategy will probably be ineffective. One danger is that, even if in his regret Crito fixates on how he could have replied to the Laws, he will always care about arguments only for how they might have changed Socrates' decision. So Socrates may need to persuade him of the value of self-examination; and to do that, Socrates may need to ensure, instead of just allowing, that the importance of examining oneself becomes a topic of conversation with him.

Now, in saying that Crito might not believe in self-examination, I should again clarify what I *don't* mean. I think we can rule out the

possibility that, when he expresses enthusiasm for it, he knowingly dissimulates his actual views—for example, that he consciously believes self-examination is silly, and he simply tries to hide it. We can rule this out, in part because of how earnest and intent he acts toward the end of the *Euthydemus* (306d-307a), where he says he is concerned about what to do about his sons. He talks there as if he is *wrestling* with the question of how to provide them an education such as by persuading one of them to take up philosophy (307a1-2). In talking that way dishonestly, he would be not just disingenuous, but extremely duplicitous, and it is too much of a stretch to think this is what he is.

But there is a more plausible diagnosis, which is that Crito, in a phrase, just doesn't get it: he does not understand what self-examination is, much less why it is as important as it is or even why it is supposed to be important. He fails to see why Socrates lives the way he does or even what it is to live that way. Part of what makes this thought especially plausible is Crito's confusion evident at the end of the *Euthydemus* (304c ff.) about what philosophy is: once Socrates has described the buffoonish Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Crito mistakes their antics for philosophy, though what they teach are parlor tricks designed just to trip up an interlocutor rather than to show what is true. Even more revealing is the way he tries to persuade Socrates at the start of the *Crito*, the way described above. Anyone who was conscious of what self-examination is and how Socrates lives would approach him in a radically different way. They would suspect he had already thought long and hard about whether to escape, such that he had considered all the obvious reasons to, and many or most of the unobvious reasons. They also would realize that changing his mind requires thoughtful, good arguments, rather than a shotgun blast of them and an emphatic plea.

What, then, is the nature of Crito's attitude toward self-examination? It is instructive, I think, to compare the way he regards it with the way many people treat religion nowadays. The comparison is fitting, in part since protreptic aims at a kind of conversion. Let me start with an apt comment from a contemporary philosopher, Daniel Dennett:

> Many people believe in God. Many people believe in *belief in* God. What's the difference? People who believe in God are sure that God exists, and they are glad, because they hold God to be the most wonderful of all things. People who moreover believe in belief in God are sure that *belief in God* exists (and who could doubt that?), and they think that this is a good state of affairs, something to be strongly encouraged and fostered wherever possible: If only *belief in God* were more widespread! One *ought* to believe in God. One ought to *strive* to believe in God. One should be uneasy, apologetic, unfulfilled, one should even feel guilty, if one finds that one just doesn't believe in God. It's a failing, but it happens.[49]

Dennett's comment is incisive, I suggest. He speaks loosely, though, and to be more accurate it helps to distinguish among the following three groups of people. If I am right, all three are easily recognizable at least in certain Christian societies today.

The first group consists of people who are genuine religious believers and act and think accordingly. They understand religious propositions, and they are deeply immersed in religious culture (some corner of it, traditional or other), at least insofar as they regularly go to church or the like and are quite familiar with the sorts of things that are said there. Some of them, though only some, may have the sentiment Dennett identifies when he speaks of believing in believing ("If only *belief in God* were more widespread! …"). If they do, it is because of their real belief in God.

The people in the second group have that sentiment for sure, but not for the same reason. Though they believe in believing, they don't actually believe in God, and if you asked, they might even say they don't, but that they wish they did. We can call these people aspirants. They might go to church, at least on occasion, but they are not one with religious culture. They like the idea of theism, but at their core religion does little or nothing to shape the way they think. Most significantly, this is less because they are atheists or agnostics at heart than because they scarcely think beyond practical affairs—practical affairs such as making money, having the right social standing, and so forth: their vision barely extends beyond day-to-day life. As a result, they never genuinely assess the truth-values of religious propositions or even come to understand them. If you endorse those propositions or say you go to church, they will applaud, but only since they generically support the idea of being a good person and bettering oneself. They won't have thought through whether being religious is the way to do that: they will take it for granted that it is, just as eating right and exercising are obviously the way to care for one's *physical* health. Similarly, if you offer them arguments for theism, your *inferences* will hardly register for them: they will salute you for the arguments' conclusion without really considering whether you have shown it is true. Arguments about religious issues are too remote from where they live.

In the third group are people we can call culturists. They have the sentiment that Dennett identifies, but for them it is chiefly an expression of solidarity with religious culture. They are deeply immersed in that culture and are driven first and foremost by a desire to be part of it, often to keep ties with family and friends. They don't *actually* believe, but they think they do, and they certainly would say they do if you asked them; in fact, they probably would give you an earful. Although they, too, never assess the truth-values of religious propositions or make the effort to understand them, for them this is out of fear of concluding that those propositions are false. If they drew that conclusion, they would have to

live as imposters or forfeit their place in religious culture. Accordingly, if you raise doubts about theism or religion, they will tend to view you as threatening and even hostile. Similarly, if you offer them arguments for theism, those arguments won't affect whether they think theism is true: they will treat them just as tools with which to promote their culture to people outside it or to signal their membership in it. (There are parallels here with political groups, for example. People whose deepest allegiance is to a progressive culture or a conservative culture will do the same with arguments involving ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity.)

I mention all this for predictable reasons. First, there is a chance that Crito is a culturist with respect to self-examination, even though it is unlikely that he is (unlikely since, if he were, he probably would be more insistent about the need to examine oneself). More important, on the main view I want to consider, he has the same posture toward self-examination that aspirants have toward God, and this is why he is the way he is. He likes the idea of learning, but he does not think like a philosopher. He enjoys watching philosophical discussion, and Socrates' exhortations can give him pause, but only for a bit; then his instincts take over. Though his apathy is most obvious in a crisis, it is always there. Deep down, philosophical arguments seem to him disconnected from life. If he were to acknowledge his view of them and put it in a modern-day slogan, he might say they work "only in theory and not in practice": they are of no use in "the real world." The commonsensical assumption is that it is better for Socrates to stay alive than to die and that it is better for Crito not to lose a beloved friend, and common sense is all that ultimately counts for Crito.

5.3.6 *A Better Strategy than Socrates'*

The situation, then, is that there are at least two plausible diagnoses of what drives Crito—namely, that he believes in self-examination at the deepest level but is self-deceived about its importance and that, to the contrary, he does not believe in it at all and simply does not understand it. These two diagnoses have conflicting implications about what Socrates' tactic should be: again, if the one diagnosis is correct, then it is pointless to try to persuade Crito of the need to examine himself, and if the other diagnosis is correct, then Socrates may *need* to persuade Crito somehow. So what should Socrates do?

The answer might seem obvious. It might seem that he should do just what he does, or at least that we have no way to gauge whether he should do otherwise. After all, the answer to the question of what he should do depends on what drives Crito, and Socrates, as a long-time friend of Crito's, probably has far more insight into Crito's psyche than we have, such that Socrates is much more likely to see how best to respond to him. Perhaps Socrates decides that Crito *is* just self-deceived

about the importance of examining himself; perhaps Socrates believes that the only way to counteract self-deception is to remove the incentive that leads to it; and maybe he figures that there is no way to do that in this case. If so, it might seem, we are not in position to second-guess him.

But I think this line of thought is wrong on two counts. First, I imagine it is likely enough that he *could* remove the incentive that leads to Crito's self-deception, if indeed Crito is self-deceived about the need to examine himself: there is enough potential for success that the attempt is worth making. Second, for reasons I indicated, I think the likelihood is that the second of the two diagnoses is correct—Crito does not believe in self-examination—and that he is like the people whom I have called aspirants. Now, there still is a chance that, instead, he does believe in self-examination and simply deceives himself about it, and there is a chance that he is more like culturists than aspirants: Socrates needs a strategy that accommodates those possibilities, too. But it seems to me that a strategy of that sort is available to him and that it would be an improvement on the strategy he favors.

Socrates could start by prompting Crito to own up to the fact that he isn't listening to the argument that seems best. Once Crito had flung his arguments at Socrates, Socrates could say, in effect: "Those arguments aren't *really* why you think I should escape, are they?" If Crito insisted that they are, Socrates could decisively refute them and then ask the question again, repeating the process until Crito admitted his lack of investment in them. And once Crito admitted it, Socrates could lead him to confess his tepidness about arguments in general, whereupon Socrates could make the value of self-examination a topic of conversation and, ultimately, offer reasons to examine oneself.

Of course, I have implied that, if Crito is like aspirants or culturists, then by itself, at least, giving him reasons will probably not faze him: he will pledge allegiance to your arguments' conclusion and leave no more convinced of it than when he arrived. But Socrates could approach him the way a religious evangelist can approach aspirants and culturists. The task with them is to get them to ask whether theism is true; it is because they don't genuinely ask that question that arguments for theism don't faze them. So for an evangelist whose only goal is to produce real religious belief, the first step with aspirants and culturists is to devastate theism, to raise objections to it which cut so deep that they wonder how theism could ever seem true, and they are ready finally to consider an argument for it. To be sure, before you do this, you have to assure them that the objections will be followed by an argument for theism, since otherwise they will tune you out; and when they know that this is your plan, they may be untroubled by the objections at first. But there is a way to make them reconsider: once you have raised the objections, you start with a theistic argument that is obviously puny,

you put your full weight down on it, and you lead them to think it is all theism has. This, at least, is the most promising route to take. Socrates could do something similar in discussing self-examination with Crito, and Socrates could then wait a bit to offer arguments that are compelling. (He has plenty of time, since his conversation with Crito starts early in the morning.)

Further, Socrates has an advantage that the religious evangelist does not. Religion is far removed from the concerns of an aspirant, whereas self-examination, in a crucial sense, is bound up with them. Unless Crito is just self-deceived about the importance of self-examination, quite likely a main reason he does not examine himself is that he is unaware that he himself already relies on arguments and that self-examination is just a way of trying to do better what all of us, including Crito, are already committed to doing as well as possible. So Socrates could make headway even just by bringing Crito to see this. Once Socrates started arguing for the importance of self-examination, he could offer examples of how everyone relies on arguments even just to function in everyday life. He could first point out how this works in the most basic cases, the most ordinary moments, and then move inch by inch to explaining how arguments about abstract issues bear on everyday questions about how to live.

Along the way, in order to offset any incentive Crito might have for deceiving himself, Socrates could present images in which people listen to something other than the argument that seems best and in which there are concrete and vividly bad consequences. I have in mind, in particular, the sorts of images (εἰκόνες) that Socrates offers in the *Republic*. In one passage, for example, he presents a hypothetical scenario in which men aboard a ship bicker over who will steer it (488a ff.). Since they are ignorant of sailing, they don't see what it takes to steer a ship well, and thus to them the skills of an expert captain seem silly and useless. Socrates likens these men to the non-philosophical masses who don't appreciate what it takes to rule a city well and who, in turn, think that philosophers would be useless as rulers. Arguably, he means that this image could persuade them that they need philosophers after all. Supposing that it could, it is easy to see why—or, at least, why this tool of persuasion is more likely to be effective than the abstract arguments Socrates has just given (arguments about knowing Forms fully enough to rule a city well)—since, more than the effects of ruling a city poorly, the effects of missteering a ship are concrete and vividly picturable. (A missteered ship will get lost or even crash.)[50] With Crito, Socrates could do something similar to what he does in that passage in the *Republic*; for example, he could offer images in which a captain picks haphazardly when to drop anchor in a storm or a winemaker decides indiscriminately when to pluck the grapes, and the ship sinks or the wine is sour. Further, Socrates could integrate his images with his explanation in order to discourage

Crito from fastening on the images and ignoring the explanation. And Socrates could keep his explanations simple enough that they would be easy enough for Crito to follow, even as distressed as he might be at the moment.

Though there is, of course, no guarantee that this strategy would succeed, it would have a real chance of success and, I submit, a better chance than the tactic I have ascribed to Socrates, one which counts on Crito's regret to lead him eventually to self-examination. Part of the reason is that this other strategy accommodates all the possibilities emphasized above: the possibility that Crito believes in self-examination but is self-deceived, the possibility that he does not believe in it and is like the people I have called aspirants, and the possibility that, instead, he is like culturists.

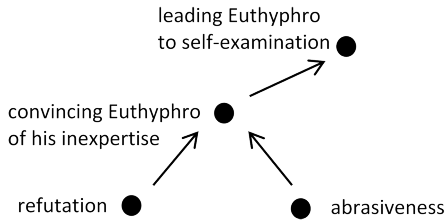
Further, with death approaching, now is a perfect time for Socrates to have the conversation with Crito that I have imagined. The likelihood, I have said, is that Crito never genuinely believes in self-examination. If so, the way he acts when under strain in the *Crito* is not an aberration, as perhaps some commentators take it to be.[51] Rather, what happens in a crisis is just that his true colors show most sharply. Hence, it is in a crisis that they will be easiest for Crito himself to see if Socrates points them out to him. And for that reason and others, this is also when Socrates is most likely to bring about change in him. It is when someone's life is at stake, for example, that Crito is most anxious to set aside high-minded philosophy and stick to common sense, as if to say: "Playtime is over—real life is at hand." If Socrates can convince him that self-examination matters even at a time like the present, Crito will believe it matters always. And then, in Socrates' absence, he may keep pursuing philosophical discussion and actually listen to the arguments he hears.

5.4 Euthyphro

I will end this chapter by revisiting the conversation in the *Euthyphro*, which I began to consider in the first two chapters above. What I say here will dovetail with my discussion there, particularly the discussion in Chapter 2, though I will reject certain thoughts I entertained in Chapter 1 and will not complete the line of argument I began there. As I did just now in the previous section, I will first make a proposal about what Socrates' strategy is, and then I will explain a way I think he could improve on it.

5.4.1 *Euthyphro's Disorientation*

In the first chapter above,[52] I imagined the following strategy that Socrates might have in talking with Euthyphro:



It is natural to suppose that Socrates' strategy is at least something like that—for example, that Socrates wants to convince Euthyphro of his inexpertise. But I think that, in fact, Socrates does not mean to convince him of it. Let me explain my reason.

Near the end of the dialogue (11b6-d2), once Euthyphro has been refuted over and over, he grows frustrated and snappish and blames Socrates for his troubles. Euthyphro seems to think his statements are perfectly fine and that somehow Socrates has just duped him by twisting his words and making bogus arguments so that it only *looks* as if Euthyphro is less than the expert he is.[53] The charge is misguided, of course. After all, near the start of the conversation, Euthyphro implies that he can define piety and show his definition to be correct,[54] and the issue in the rest of the discussion is whether he, indeed, can. So even if, say, some or all of Socrates' arguments are bogus, this should not matter—Euthyphro should be able to expose the flaws in these arguments; and giving him deceptive arguments is a fair test of whether he can defend his view well enough, since someone who can adequately defend a view is able to deflect deceptive arguments, able to identify what is wrong with them.

Nonetheless, it is understandable that Euthyphro reacts the way he does: all of us, when our claims have fared poorly, face a powerful temptation to blame our interlocutor. And in that connection, there are two initial points I want to make. The first is that Socrates can easily predict that Euthyphro will succumb to this temptation. The second is that, rather than trying to stop him from doing so, Socrates encourages him to. Here are two pieces of evidence for the first point, followed by two pieces of evidence for both points.

First, in the *Euthyphro* Socrates is probably aware of how strong this temptation is, at least because of how often he has seen his interlocutors fall prey to it. Meno falls prey to it in the *Meno*, for example, as do Callicles in the *Gorgias* (483a-b), Hippias in the *Hippias Minor* (369b-c, 373b), and Protagoras in the dialogue named after him (360e); and Socrates' conversations with them predate his conversation with Euthyphro, as do most of the other events in Plato's dialogues. (Regardless of when Plato wrote the *Euthyphro*, the fictive conversation in it is set at a later date.)

Second, many people who are new to philosophy are inclined to doubt its value at some level. In particular, they are prone to say to themselves that it is just a game and that it is empty in the sense that none of its arguments could ever show us what is true: all they will ever measure is how clever the arguers are. And as Socrates probably realizes, Euthyphro, especially, will be tempted by that thought, mainly because of the way he regards the Homeric texts. He thinks they are authoritative and cover all the important topics, such that the way to get knowledge that counts for something is just to interpret Homer correctly.[55] One can overplay the resemblance between him and many contemporary religious believers, but he does have something in common with them. Just as their sentiment tends to be "I don't need philosophy; I already have the Bible," Euthyphro is liable to say: "I already have Homer."

Third, his ability to *interpret* Homer is all he has in mind when he claims to be an expert: at first, Euthyphro has no thought of being expert in the sort of philosophical argumentation that Socrates asks for. Though Euthyphro implies inadvertently that he can show what piety is, this is only because Socrates blindsides him with an issue that is foreign to him. When Socrates poses the question "What is piety?" Euthyphro gives a feeble answer ("Piety is doing what I'm doing now"; 5d8-9) because he does not understand what a question like that one means when it comes from a philosopher: he doesn't see that it means "What are the shared distinguishing features of all pious actions?"[56] And though he begins to have an inkling of it once Socrates explains (6d-e), Socrates moves fast enough, there and throughout, that Euthyphro is always one step behind him and fighting to catch up, and spends most of the conversation just trying to get his bearings. Without being dragged into it, Euthyphro would not claim to be able to identify the shared distinguishing traits of all pious actions, even just by inferring it from Homer's writings: he would claim only to have gleaned from them that certain actions are pious and that certain others are impious. In short, the sort of expertise that Socrates tests for is not a sort that Euthyphro values or, under normal circumstances, would have said he has.[57]

Finally, and most importantly, it is by design that Euthyphro is often so lost in the conversation: at one point and maybe others, Socrates *means* to confuse him so that he is off kilter and has to scramble to understand. There is a passage where Socrates is deliberately obscure (11e7-12d4), if what I said in Chapter 2 is correct; and he obfuscates, probably intentionally, in other passages, too.[58] Yet as he surely realizes, he often is unpersuasive even with interlocutors who are oriented enough to follow him, and quite likely even they are unpersuaded because they think Socrates bewitches them: as Adeimantus says about them in the *Republic*, they believe they are "misled a little by

the argument" at each stage of Socrates' questioning, "and when the littles are collected at the end … the slip turns out to be great …" (487b4-6).

Add all this together, and on the one hand, it is no wonder if Euthyphro feels snookered in the end—not refuted, but just outfoxed, manipulated, and dazed, as if he has played a shell game. On the other hand, it is unlikely that Socrates means to convince him of his inexpertise, since, again, Socrates can predict that Euthyphro will feel this way, and rather than easing Euthyphro's suspicions, Socrates feeds them.

5.4.2 *Socrates' Strategy*

If Socrates does not mean to convince Euthyphro of his inexpertise, then what *is* Socrates' intention? I propose that he means for Euthyphro to draw the following conclusion, which, for ease of reference, I will label the inadequacy conclusion:

> *inadequacy conclusion*: Even if Euthyphro has the expertise he thinks he has, he needs something else, too: he needs to be able to answer the sorts of questions Socrates asks. Otherwise Euthyphro will tend to look foolish, just as he probably looks foolish to any bystanders who overhear his conversation with Socrates. No matter if questions of this sort are illicit or if people should not care whether Euthyphro can answer them: if they trip him up, then his critics will keep dismissing him and laughing, and no one will believe he is an expert.

I suggest that, accordingly, Socrates' game plan with Euthyphro is just to beat him black and blue, to make the conversation so traumatic and humiliating that, even if Euthyphro never doubts his expertise, he will decide that, by itself, it is inadequate, and in order to prepare himself to answer the sorts of questions Socrates asks, he will start to think about philosophical issues, albeit grudgingly. This, I propose, is why Socrates is happy enough to seem underhanded and to look as if he bullies Euthyphro for sport: he suspects his refutations will hurt more if they come from someone distasteful, someone who, in Euthyphro's mind, is shifty and takes pleasure in inflicting them. Socrates recognizes that, for the moment, his tactics will probably make Euthyphro distrustful of him and only more doubtful of the brand of inquiry he represents—for example, that his obscurity will leave Euthyphro more inclined to see philosophy as fast talk. But Socrates' hope is that eventually, sometime after Euthyphro starts considering philosophical questions, he will come to see that they are worth taking seriously. Socrates realizes, of course, that this is unlikely to happen. He just figures it is more likely than that Euthyphro will admit he is not an expert; and having given up

on convincing him that he is not, Socrates sees no real option besides bludgeoning him into the conclusion I just named.

Though there is no decisive evidence for this interpretation, there is at least some that works in its favor. First, given what Socrates does in the dialogue, there probably is no charitable alternative to this interpretation if he does not mean to convince Euthyphro of his inexpertise. No less important, Socrates surely sees how much Euthyphro wants to be admired and hates it that he is not. Socrates clearly speaks to Euthyphro's frustration when he says, soothingly, that "to be laughed at does not matter, perhaps" (3c6-7). It also is obvious in Euthyphro's shrill insistence that he can demonstrate his expertise (e.g., 5b9-c3, e2-3, 7a6, 9b6, b10-11). And it is inferable in other respects, too. For example, Socrates can piece it together from the circumstances in which Euthyphro is prosecuting his father. In Naxos, when Euthyphro's father needed expert religious counsel, he sent a messenger all the way to Athens to consult religious authorities there (4c8-9), yet Euthyphro was with his father in Naxos at the time, so his father could have just consulted Euthyphro if Euthyphro really is the expert he claims to be. Evidently, then, his father rejects Euthyphro's claims to be a religious expert; and Euthyphro probably is hurt by this. It must be bad enough that people in the assembly laugh at Euthyphro; it must be all the worse that even his own father is dismissive.[59] Quite likely, this is why Euthyphro is prosecuting.

5.4.3 *Strengths of Socrates' Strategy*

The strategy I just pictured is more sensible than we might guess at first. To a great extent, Socrates does just what he should. I will explain my reasons at some length, since they will be significant when I ask what he could do better.

What speaks in Socrates' favor is not that his strategy is very promising (it probably is not) but that it is hard to think of another that is any better. On the face of it, at least, Euthyphro leaves him few viable options. It does not work, for example, to try to befriend Euthyphro instead of refuting him; as I said in Chapter 1, unless you challenge his claim to expertise you just feed his sense of superiority and his assurance that he has no need to inquire.[60] Yet at the same time, trying to convince him of his inexpertise is not a good idea.[61] Euthyphro does not see why one needs to be able to answer philosophical questions in order to be an expert, and it would be problematic for Socrates to pause in the middle of his refutations or at the outset of the conversation to explain why one does.[62] Among other reasons, once he did that, it would look as if he was making a case for the importance of what he said. This would invite Euthyphro to think that Socrates *had* to make a case for it, such that he was on the defensive; and then Euthyphro could too easily be dismissive of his refutations and take them with a grain of

salt. For that matter, if there were bystanders overhearing the conversation, it probably would be less clear to *them* that Socrates was in command. When non-philosophers take part in or observe an argumentative exchange, they tend to focus less on the evidentiary force of what is said than on the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of it—for example, whether one interlocutor makes a claim baldly, without qualification or hesitation, and the other interlocutor then concedes.[63] Roughly, this means that they pay more attention to how the conversation looks—who in it *appears* to have the upper hand—than to what is actually proven. In Euthyphro's case, their takeaway might amount to little more than "Socrates said a lot of smart things, and Euthyphro only sputtered in reply": they might simply enjoy the spectacle in which Euthyphro is overrun. And slowing the pace of the conversation would make it *less* of a spectacle. Socrates' refutations would be less dazzling, even if the onlookers followed Socrates' every word. So they probably would react less strongly, such as by laughing less. And then it would be even easier for Euthyphro to dismiss or ignore Socrates' refutations.

Further, even if Euthyphro were to accept the idea that religious expertise requires philosophical expertise, he probably still would overlook the fact that he fails to demonstrate the latter in his conversation with Socrates. Part of the problem is that he barely follows what Socrates says about piety, as I noted; and pausing for clarifications, like pausing for explanations, would make the conversation less exciting for any passersby who stopped to listen to it.[64] Plus, even if Euthyphro fully grasped what was said, he probably still would be unpersuaded of his inexpertise. Most likely, he is not just mistaken but self-deceived about whether he is an expert. Among other reasons, he apparently keeps believing in his expertise even after being refuted dramatically, and that is unsurprising, particularly if, as the text may suggest, he thinks he is worthless unless he is an expert.[65] Though this is not conclusive evidence of self-deception, it does suggest that he is not just nearsighted because of carelessness or the like, but outright blind due to something deeper. And if he *is* stuck in self-deception, there may be little that will break him out of it besides somehow removing the incentive that leads to it.

Yet it is difficult to see how Socrates might remove it. To be sure, as I noted in Chapter 1, he could try to convince Euthyphro that one can have worth even without being an expert.[66] But this probably would do no good: even if Euthyphro were convinced, he probably still would want to believe in his expertise, since he thinks it makes him superior to other people (5a1-2), and he likes feeling superior. The chances are that he will keep believing in his expertise until he recognizes that his claim to it has been refuted. And that is the problem, since, all things being equal, his self-deception will keep him from recognizing that it has.

So, again, Socrates does the best he can, at least in certain respects. For one, he is right to start small—to ask Euthyphro to believe not that

he needs to be able to answer philosophical questions in order to be an expert, but just that he needs to be able to answer them in order to *look* like one. Whereas Euthyphro is unlikely to accept the former conclusion, there is a decent chance that he will accept the latter (supposing, at least, that he views philosophical questions simply as non-exegetical ones, the sorts of questions he faces when he sets Homer aside and tries to defend claims without invoking him). In the course of his conversation with Socrates, Euthyphro realizes that he looks bad because of how flummoxed he has become. This is clear from what he says in the passage I cited above (11b6-d2) where, after he has been refuted repeatedly, he explodes in exasperation and, in effect, accuses Socrates of cleverly twisting his words. That accusation amounts to an admission that he has lost face, since if he thought his statements look fine and that Socrates has just failed to see it, he would accuse Socrates of being dense rather than devious. Moreover, this passage is true to life: like Plato's Euthyphro, a real-life Euthyphro would realize that getting so flummoxed makes you look bad. The delusional person thinks it doesn't; the self-deceived person thinks merely that it shouldn't—in other words, that appearance is at odds with reality in their case. And Euthyphro *is* conscious of how he *appears*. Though he tries to ignore the fact that people laugh at him (3c3-5), he is unsuccessful; again, it bothers him.

There is another respect in which Socrates does well. He is right to refute Euthyphro and to make the refutations sting, since *before* Euthyphro is pummeled over and over, he does not appreciate how ill-equipped he is to answer philosophical questions or how bad he can look if he flounders in the face of them; this is clear from the extent to which Socrates blindsides him. I will leave open the question of whether Socrates needs to be abrasive in the process of refuting him, a question I used as an example at one point in Chapter 1. (To answer that question, I would need to carry out the sort of investigation described there.) But we can say with confidence that his refutations are in order.

Of course, since he focuses Euthyphro just on *looking* like an expert instead of actually being one, there is a worry here similar to one I mentioned in discussing Crito: if Euthyphro decided to pursue philosophical questions just in order to look the right way, he might always pursue them only for that reason rather than for the sake of finding the truth. But Socrates has less leeway with him than with someone like Crito, Meno, or for that matter even Thrasymachus. For the most part, Socrates is right to be no more ambitious than he is.

5.4.4 *A Better Strategy than Socrates'*

However, there are weaknesses in his strategy, and there is a way he could improve on it. One difficulty with it is that, by the end of the conversation, once Euthyphro and his ego have taken blow after blow, he

may be too disgusted to draw the inadequacy conclusion, too inclined to reject any idea he associates with Socrates. More fundamentally, accepting that conclusion would probably not be enough to make him pursue philosophical questions for *any* reason, even if it were simply to *look* like an expert. The inadequacy conclusion is about a problem he only might have sometime in the future (namely, that someone might stump him with philosophical questions, whereupon people laugh at him), and he is unlikely to care about it when he considers it by itself. He is preoccupied with the problem he already has (people already treat him as a laughingstock), and that problem is bad enough that he probably hopes to fix it first and worry about other problems later.

The way to get his attention, then, is to address *it*. And there is a simple, obvious way Socrates could do that. He could point out something basic that Euthyphro has overlooked—namely, that the reason people dismiss him already, or a main reason, at least, is that he stakes his claim to religious expertise solely on his ability to interpret Homer.[67] Euthyphro's posture toward him is highly exceptional. Generally, Euthyphro's contemporaries admire Homer, but they hardly treat him as gospel, as Euthyphro does. Though the writings of Homer and Hesiod are sometimes referred to as "the Bible of the Greeks," they were never regarded as sacred scripture the way our Bible has been, and Euthyphro's era witnessed a "collapse of the authority of the poets and the myth administered by them," as one scholar once put it, and "the creation of a typical enlightened attitude of the average educated man towards religion" for whom myths such as Homer's, if taken literally, were "untrue and impious."[68] Few of Euthyphro's contemporaries will assume that you can foretell the future just by interpreting Homer correctly. To most of them, it must seem quackish and comical that, without any explanation, Euthyphro expects to be revered as a prophet for his ability to interpret him. If Euthyphro wants the status of a religious expert, he needs to argue compellingly that Homer's claims are true: he needs to explain either why Homer is authoritative or why, regardless, the views that Euthyphro has gleaned from him are correct. And to equip himself to do that, he needs to have thought through philosophical questions, at least to ensure that he won't contradict himself; for example, he has to make sure that together all his views, his views about which actions are pious and which are not, total up to a coherent theory about the nature of piety. This is important especially in case his listeners ask him questions in response to his claims, as they likely will if they ever give him a second thought. Of course, few of them will care whether he meets a philosopher's standards for consistency and argumentation, but it does matter to them whether he can meet their everyday standards—the sorts of standards by which they judge what anyone says in public debate, even when public debate addresses philosophical topics, as it does often and inevitably. They are the standards that Sophists cater to, for example,

and the standards by which public figures are measured most often even nowadays, such as when *they* make philosophical claims. (Today few people ask how you would fare under scrutiny in a philosophy colloquium, but they do care if you look silly in a debate on TV.)

To be sure, Socrates would have to make the point explicit, stating directly the conclusion he wanted Euthyphro to draw; Euthyphro probably would not see it on his own, as he might come to see the inadequacy conclusion. But he would be likely enough to accept this point if Socrates spelled it out; likely enough, anyway, if Socrates introduced it at the right time—namely, just after Euthyphro exploded in exasperation. (If Socrates waited any longer, Euthyphro might grow too disgusted to accept it. And if Socrates introduced it earlier, Euthyphro might not be ready for it. At least, Socrates would not have enough evidence that Euthyphro was ready, since it is only once he explodes that it is fully clear that he has seen how bad he looks.) What Socrates would tell him is true, and evidently Euthyphro is just observant enough to realize it is. He seems to recognize how common it is to be skeptical about the Homeric myths, since he is unsurprised when Socrates expresses skepticism about them (6a).

More important, Socrates could frame the point in a way that tugged at Euthyphro and made him *want* to accept it. Early in the conversation, Euthyphro speaks as if Socrates is a fellow prophet, as if to identify himself with Socrates. Misrepresenting the nature of Socrates' divine sign, Euthyphro implies that it lets Socrates foretell the future and even that this is why Socrates is under indictment: his religious claims make him unpopular, just as Euthyphro's make Euthyphro (3b-c). Socrates quickly corrects him, rejecting the label 'prophet' and dissociating himself from Euthyphro (e3); and it is good that Socrates does this before refuting him, since Socrates' refutations will, indeed, sting more if they come from someone Euthyphro regards as an opponent rather than an ally. But after the refutations and once Euthyphro exploded, Socrates could shift drastically and align himself with Euthyphro. Here is an example of what Socrates could say:

> Euthyphro, I can keep up the charade no longer. We must stop here so that I can make a confession. You see, my friend, I've been playacting all this time. Listen, if you will, as I explain why, for this is important: everything depends on it. It's true what you implied: I am a prophet. I realize that so are you, and I believe in you, Euthyphro; that part of what I said is true. What is more, I want all our fellow Athenians to realize what they have in you and to benefit from it. But as you know, many of them are skeptical.

After saying this, Socrates could go on to make the point I just described, explaining why prophets must think through philosophical

issues in order to be recognized as experts by the crowd, as Euthyphro calls them (3b9: τοὺς πολλούς). And then Socrates could add the following:

> It is regrettable that you and I must spend our time this way, but we indeed must, if we are to persuade the crowd so that they will hear us. The questions they raise are misguided, of course, but they can befuddle even someone as wise as you. And if this happens, the crowd will only keep laughing instead of listening: they will be deaf to the wisdom you are able to share. I playacted just now, posing my silly questions, so as to demonstrate for you how easy it is to be befuddled, and to plead with you to keep it from happening to you. As silly as these sorts of questions are, we prophets must seek answers to them if we are to prepare ourselves to be persuasive and be heard. That is what I have done for many years, though sadly I have failed to find the answers I was after. Since I have none, I am helpless against the crowd, as you can see from the fact that I'm now under indictment. But hear me, Euthyphro: where I've failed, you will succeed if you try, and perhaps in a short time. The divine sign tells me so. Will you follow my advice? Please say you will, my friend. At stake is nothing less than the welfare of this city.

These maneuvers would be promising, I think. Of course, I said above that it would be problematic for Socrates to pause in the middle of his refutations or at the outset of the conversation to explain why Euthyphro should care about philosophical questions. One might ask, then, whether there is a problem with explaining it afterward, as I am proposing. But I doubt there is. Again, the trouble with pausing in the middle or beforehand is that it would take the sting out of the refutations; it might keep Euthyphro from looking bad and from seeing how bad he looked. Once he had seen it, the refutations would have done their job, and glossing them would not reverse the work they had done, since their purpose, once more, would be not to convince him of his inexpertise but just to show him how bad cross-examination can make him look. Now, how bad it makes you look, when you have claimed to be an expert, depends on how much your cross-examiner appears to have the upper hand with you, and what I said before is true: while Socrates was acting as cross-examiner, he might look less in charge if he paused to explain the importance of his questions, since he then might seem to be on the defensive. But there would be no harm in explaining it later, after he doubled-back and claimed to have only playacted in carrying out his cross-examination. By making that claim, he would effectively distinguish himself from a character he had played, and the *character* would still seem to have dominated Euthyphro, even if it looked now as if Socrates had not and was not doing so. Of course,

if there were bystanders overhearing the exchange, they might see through the distinction and chuckle, suspecting that the character and Socrates were one and the same. But it probably would seem plausible to *Euthyphro* that the two were different. Apparently, Euthyphro knows only a little about Socrates' typical practices. Though he is aware that Socrates spends much of his time in the Lyceum (2a) and often refers to the divine sign (3b), for example, Euthyphro seems strangely unfamiliar with Socrates' habit of questioning people, given the extent to which Socrates catches him off guard. Or if he *is* familiar with it, he regards himself as special and somehow immune to it.

It also is plenty likely that Euthyphro would buy into the rest of what Socrates said. To say otherwise, I think, is to underestimate how desperate he is. Euthyphro is bad off—socially down and out; everyone, even his own father, regards him as a joke, and it consumes him—understandably, since he lives in a culture in which prestige is all-important. Socrates' vote of confidence in him would be his one source of hope. Besides, although he wants an admirer more than a friend, he does want a friend. He acts like it, particularly when he tries to associate himself with Socrates in the way I mentioned just now. All of this is notable, supposing it is true what many researchers say, that human beings are prone to accept the claims of people who are like them and whom they are dependent on.[69] If that view is correct, Euthyphro would tend to go along with Socrates once Socrates shifted.

To be sure, there still is only a chance, perhaps, that Euthyphro would end up genuinely examining himself. He can even seem immovable because of how deep his self-deception runs. As I implied, it would take a lot of work, more work than I have taken on, to see how Socrates could succeed for sure in the end. Instead of seeking a strategy that is radically different from his, as one would need to, I have tried just to name a strategy that is similar to it and improves on it. But if I am right, I have found one.

5.5 Conclusion

I have discussed the conversations Socrates has with four of his interlocutors, Thrasymachus, Meno, Crito, and Euthyphro. Imagining that he and they are real people rather than fictive characters, I argued that Socrates does as well as possible with Thrasymachus and Meno and that there are ways he could do better with Crito and Euthyphro. I said that, in the first stretch of the *Republic*, Socrates has Glaucon and Adeimantus do the very thing that Thrasymachus wants most to do and fails to do—namely, force Socrates into the position of answering questions—and that Socrates thereby leads Thrasymachus to reconsider the value of self-examination and whether he should engage in it. In discussing Socrates' conversation with Meno, I claimed that Socrates is

right to refute him and that Socrates has promising ways of guarding against the dangers that the refutation creates—for example, devices for drawing Meno out of self-deception and for positioning him to have to defend the arguments he is given. In considering the conversation in the *Crito*, I first suggested that Socrates intends to silence Crito so that later he will have regrets that eventually lead him to self-examination. Then I claimed that Socrates could take a more promising tack, in part by arguing against the value of self-examination so as to prepare Crito to hear an argument *for* it. Moving finally to the conversation with Euthyphro, I first proposed that Socrates means just to traumatize him so that he will decide that he needs to be able to answer philosophical questions, and then I argued that there is a better way to have him draw that conclusion, one that involves, among other things, posing as a fellow prophet of his. As I warned they would be, my conclusions have been modest, since I have not carried out my two approaches completely. But I hope to have shown that we can make progress with them, so that protreptic is worth studying in the way I have described. Ideally, I have even given other interpreters something to build on, and they will improve on what I have said.

Notes

1. Commentators often do this. E.g., it is how Hoesly and Smith (2013, 192–93) and O'Neill (1988, 181–83) conclude that Socrates succeeds with Thrasymachus, and how McCoy (2019, 170–74) and Scott (2005, 209–13) decide whether Socrates makes progress with Meno.
2. See esp. Pekarsky 1994, 128, 132.
3. As an author, why might Plato have Socrates fail sometimes? There are a number of possible reasons. E.g., Plato may have come to have "deep philosophical, methodological, and educational disagreements" with the historical Socrates, to co-opt a phrase (Beversluis 2000, 383). Maybe, instead, he hoped his Athenian readers would learn something about themselves—e.g., that they were so preoccupied with honor and shame that they put the historical Socrates to death because he made them look bad (see esp. Heath 2005, 261–314). More simply, Plato may have wanted to keep his Socrates from "functioning as a model for unreflective imitation" (Blondell 2002, 103; see 84–112). For a sample of other possible reasons, see Scott 2000, ch. 5.
4. Blondell 2002, 184.
5. Thrasymachus uses basically the same phrase, τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον, at 338c3, 339a3–4, 341a3–4, 344c7–8.
6. I mean not that Socrates refutes Thrasymachus' claims about justice but that he refutes his claim to know what justice is.
7. Thanks to Scott Aikin and Don Marshall for pointing this out to me.
8. Perhaps another reason to think Thrasymachus believes what he says is that he refuses when Clitophon tries to help him resolve the conflict in his first definition of justice (340a–c). Thrasymachus sees that Clitophon's strategy would work—i.e., that it would work to say justice is what rulers *believe* is in their favor—but Thrasymachus sticks to his guns and says that rulers never err.

9. I paraphrase Wedgwood (2017, 39) here and borrow especially from him in the next three lines. Scholars have read Thrasymachus' claims in a wide variety of ways; some have even said that the claims together form an incoherent whole. Wedgwood cites earlier work and responds to it. Chappell's (1993, 2) summary reaches farther back.
10. See Arruzza 2019, 104, 105 and Heinaman 2002, 322–23n.28: "Thrasymachus ... [does] point out the evil consequences of ordinary injustice (344b), i.e. injustice that is not able to avoid punishment and the opprobrium of others. Only injustice done in secret (as in the extreme case of Gyges' ring) or on a large scale (as in the case of a tyrant) can avoid these consequences (344a–c, 345a; cf. 360e–361b, 365c–d, 367b–c). So although Thrasymachus says that injustice is profitable and justice is not profitable (348c), his position is that it is only large scale or secret injustice that is profitable (344c, 348b, d; cf. 345a)."
11. Though Socrates is extraordinarily gentle during most of his conversation with Cephalus, toward the end he moves to refute him, and Cephalus begins to concede, before Polemarchus breaks in (331b–d).
12. As Irwin (1995, 188–89) maintains. To be sure, Burnyeat (2013, 212–13) is right to suggest that, since Glaucon and Adeimantus don't contend that injustice is a virtue, their argument is, in one respect, *easier* to refute. It may be harder on the whole, though. Take, e.g., the argument Socrates makes (349b1–350c11) right before Thrasymachus blushes and sweats. As Nawar (2018, 385) has pointed out, that argument is forceful against Thrasymachus since he claims (e.g., 344a1–2) that anyone who truly practices the art of ruling wants to outdo (πλεονεκτεῖν) not just some people but everyone. Yet Glaucon and Adeimantus make no such claim, and as a result they are invulnerable to arguments like that one.
13. At heart, perhaps, their argument is the same as Thrasymachus', as Reeve (2008, 84–86) argues it is, against scholars such as Williams (2006, 119). Note also that Socrates is ready to leave at the start of Book 2, and he later tells Glaucon and Adeimantus: "I thought I showed in what I said to Thrasymachus that justice is better than injustice" (368b5–6). Weiss (2007, 90) is right that "the only reason Socrates feels he must stay is because, as he observes, 'you did not accept it from me'" (quoting b6–7).
14. See Hoesly and Smith 2013 and Teloh 1986, 94, 97. For Hoesly and Smith, shaming Thrasymachus serves the psychotherapeutic purpose of "exposing [his] problem," which is "his intellectual instability and lack of self-control," and "compelling him to seek help" or change his ways (192). Central to their evidence are the following three points, among others: [1] Socrates shames many of his other interlocutors, [2] he says in the *Apology* (29e–30a) that he spends his life shaming people who falsely believe they have wisdom, and [3] Thrasymachus must be blind to his own true motives—though he thinks he admires injustice, he must be invested in justice instead—because otherwise he would not complain, as he does, that Socrates cheats during his conversation with him: if Thrasymachus really admired injustice, he would applaud cheating. I have reservations since [1] Socrates may take different approaches with different interlocutors, [2] he allows in the *Apology* that shaming people is not his main goal but just a byproduct of what he intends (plus, I am supposing, of course, that he might not believe everything he says), and [3] I suspect that, as Thrasymachus sees it, calling attention to your interlocutor's treachery is simply part of vying for dominance over them and stopping them from dominating *you*.

15. Even Nawar and Payne, who defend the arguments Socrates gives Thrasymachus, concede that they have substantial weaknesses; see Nawar 2018, esp. 384, 387n.81 and the text to it and Payne 2017, 37, 62. Earlier commentators, whom Nawar cites, have seen grave deficits in those arguments.
16. Of course, to avoid a sparring match, Socrates could pretend to be persuaded by Thrasymachus' view about justice and then leave it to Glaucon and the others to raise objections to it. One problem, though, is that they would probably direct their objections more to Socrates than to Thrasymachus, because of how surprised they would be that Socrates had been persuaded.
17. We have to conclude that this claim is refuted even if we think justification is relatively cheap, such as if we accept epistemic conservatism, as epistemologists call it. Consider, e.g., McCain's (2008) version of it. McCain argues that if someone holds a belief that is not incoherent (e.g., the belief that they can defend a certain claim adequately), the person is thereby justified in retaining that belief, all things being equal; but McCain allows that the person is no longer justified once the belief has been defeated for them, and he says that one way it can be defeated for them is if they end up with better reasons for denying the belief than for affirming it (186). Meno surely meets this condition by the end of the Refutative Phase.
18. These are commonplaces among scholars. See Scott 2005, 12–13, 60–62 and Klein 1965, 44–45, 71–73.
19. According to Aristotle, the historical Gorgias did not provide a systematic training in rhetoric but simply handed his pupils speeches to memorize; *Sophistical Refutations* 183b36–184a8.
20. Besides self-deception or wishful thinking, a Freudian subconscious, e.g., might lead the person to deny that they have been refuted. If it does, however, there probably is little you can do to help, short of leading them through psychoanalysis.
21. Among other reasons, the argument in Meno's paradox trades on an equivocation that is easy to identify. In the following rendition of the argument, the equivocation is on the term 'know':

    1 For all *X*, either you know *X*, or you do not.
    2 You cannot seek *X* if you know it already.
    3 Neither can you seek *X* if you do *not* know it, since you then will not know what to look for.
    4 Thus, for any *X*, inquiry into *X* is futile.

    In premise 2 'know' must mean "know *every*thing about," whereas in premise 3 'know' must mean "know *any*thing about." The argument is unsound if we hold the meaning of 'know' stable, since in that case premise 2 or 3 is false; and the argument is unsound if we shift the meaning of 'know', since premise 1 then is false. (I borrow some wording from Shields 2012, 64–65.) At least, so Socrates could claim; and Meno would be ill-equipped to respond. One can construe Meno's paradox differently from how I just have; see Ebrey 2014 and Fine 2014, which contain other references.
22. The classic theories are versions of so-called intentionalism and deflationism. The chief issue between the two is whether self-deception is intentional—or, whether people who engage in self-deception mislead themselves knowingly, in roughly the way one person might deceive another person. Whereas intentionalists such as Davidson (2004) say the answer is "yes," deflationists such as Mele (2001) think the answer is "no." But even Mele says that self-deception is always motivated by

a desire—self-deception has the function of sating the desire (e.g., the desire to dazzle people the way Meno wants to)—such that, without the requisite desire and, in turn, an incentive, there will be no self-deception. Some recent theorists, such as Smith (2014), hold that self-deception, ultimately, is due not to a desire or incentive but to sub-personal mechanisms instilled in us most likely by natural selection: for the good of the species, perhaps, we simply are hard-wired to deceive ourselves in certain cases. As Lynch (2017, 784–85) notes, one problem with theories such as Smith's is that they do not accommodate the powerful intuition that a person's self-deception is something they are responsible for.

23. Perhaps this is all Socrates means to provide in presenting the theory of recollection. I take seriously Weiss' (2001) view that, in the *Meno*, part of Socrates' scheme for turning Meno to philosophy is to deceive him by espousing that theory: Socrates does not actually believe it, at least the version of it that he offers Meno, but he sees that Meno would be uninterested in philosophy if he realized how inconclusive it is, so Socrates tries to trick him into thinking it will yield knowledge.
24. Philosophers of education have often noted this in discussing Socrates. See Jonas 2015, 40 and Rancière 1991, 29, 59.
25. Gill 2000, 142. There are similar claims in Cotton 2014, 25–27 and Kamtekar 2012, 269–70.
26. Rider (2012; 2011) says that Socrates does the former in Plato's *Lysis* and the latter in Plato's *Euthydemus*.
27. Shaw (2015, ch. 3) thinks Socrates does this in Plato's *Protagoras*, and Kahn (1983) is one who sees something similar in Plato's *Gorgias*.
28. For my reason for drawing from those other dialogues, too, see note 50 in §1.3.3 above.
29. See esp. Emlyn-Jones 1999, 4.
30. The two can seem to be at odds with each other, since the Laws demand that Socrates follow them as child obeys parent and slave obeys master (50d–51d), whereas in the *Apology* (23d, 29c–d) Socrates vows to favor divine command over legal decree.
31. At *Phaedo* 115c, he ignores an obvious implication of Socrates' arguments for immortality. At *Crito* 44e2–45a3, he urges Socrates not to consider whether his friends would suffer a penalty for helping him escape, though Socrates has just implied that penalties of that sort are not worth fearing. Shortly thereafter, Crito warns Socrates that he will look cowardly and unmanly to many people (45e–46a), though Socrates has just said that it should not matter to him (44c).
32. Socrates (48d8–e3) and Crito (44b7, c3–5) both imply that they have had many conversations on the topic before. Elsewhere (46b6–c3, c7–d9, 49a5–b5) Socrates implies that there are Socratic theses that Crito has forgotten or ignored, and at other points (48b2–9, 49e1–3) both of them imply it.
33. Commentators such as Colaiaco (2001, 202) and Young (1974) have found Crito unintelligent, but see Hatzistavrou 2013, 583: "Crito's arguments, though not Socratic, are coherent and reasonable, at least from the point [of view] of the many's moral framework. ... His description of the plan to bribe officials and help Socrates' escape to Thessaly (*Crito* 45a6–c5), though sketchy, does not seem absurd. His account of the harm Socrates' children will suffer is reasonable and at least prima facie relevant to the discussion (45c10–d7). His claims that by dying Socrates will serve his enemies' aims (45c6–9) and harm the public image of his friends (45d9–46a4) raise reasonable concerns at least from the point of view of the many." And see Stokes 2005, 29–32.

34. 45c. See Vasiliou 2008, 60n.28 and the works cited therein on why Crito's point is not simply that justice *permits* Socrates to escape but that it requires him to do so.
35. Beversluis (2000, 66) denies that the point about losing a friend is one of Crito's arguments; Beversluis says that Crito does not appeal to pity. But Crito's point need not be an appeal to pity even if it is an argument, and it is a point worth Socrates' consideration even if ultimately it should not change his decision.
36. He does say he is "sleepless and sorrowful" (43b4). However, Stokes (2005, 27–29) has reasons to think Crito is relatively calm, even if distressed. Most significant, to my mind, is that instead of waking Socrates, Crito waits patiently for him to awake on his own (43a9–b2). Stokes writes: "This is not, one would have thought, the behaviour of a man too distraught to think, but rather of one who has himself well in hand" (27).
37. E.g., 44e6–45a1, 45a6, b6–7. I think the point stands even if, as Emlyn-Jones (1999, 58) says, the repetition is a rhetorical device that Crito uses deliberately.
38. Commentators, incidentally, have often noted how lukewarm Crito is toward philosophy and the like. Even Beversluis (2000, 61–62) does. And see esp. Weiss 1998, 43–49. Qualifying the view, Liebersohn (2015a, 106, 117) says that Crito is philosophically-minded "in regular circumstances," just not at other times: in the *Crito*, Plato designs him "to represent the man who knows what is right and how a good man should behave, but fails to apply this knowledge when the moment of truth arrives." Evidently, by the way, Liebersohn reads the *Crito* in isolation from dialogues such as the *Euthydemus* and *Phaedo* (see 103n.1).
39. See §1.1.
40. I borrow this point from Robert Talisse, though I don't know that he still accepts it.
41. See Brisson 1997, 180–81 and Allen 1980, 67–68. Liebersohn's (2015b, 33–34, 36) main evidence that Crito cares most about his reputation is that he does not protest when Socrates (44c6–9) ignores Crito's point about friendship (44b8–9) and responds just to what he says about how he will look. I demur not only because Crito is often inattentive, as I have said, but also because of how he picks the arguments he offers at the outset of the dialogue. Again, I think his criterion is not what *should* persuade Socrates but only what will. If so, the reason Crito abandons the point about friendship may be just that, when Socrates ignores it, Crito figures it does not move him.
42. Weiss 1998, 40.
43. I take this point from Moore 2011, 1024–25.
44. Commentators such as Harte (1999, 118–20) and Weiss (1998, 134–40) may be correct that, by saying he hears the Laws the way the Corybants hear their flutes (54d), Socrates indicates that he does not accept the reasons the Laws give; but if he does indicate this, it most likely is lost on Crito, as Socrates probably realizes. Moore (2011, 1038–44) offers seven reasons to think that Crito will not take Socrates to agree with the Laws' speech and that Socrates will expect him not to; e.g., borrowing from Harte and Weiss, among others, Moore says that Socrates likens the Laws' speech to one an orator might give and that Crito must be well aware that Socrates distrusts orators. One problem I see with that reason, e.g., is that, again, Crito often ignores the implications of other people's claims.
45. This is roughly Moore's (2011) reading.

46. This is unlikely, in part because he claims only to believe in the value of philosophy "whenever [he is] in [Socrates'] company" (*Euthydemus* 306d2), meaning, apparently, that the effect wears off when he is not. Plus, at times he is unserious even when Socrates is around—e.g., at the start of the *Crito*, when he hurls his arguments at Socrates. And given the manner in which he does this, it is doubtful that he does it in spite of himself or with regret or a sense of guilt.
47. Certain philosophers deny that self-deception works the way I picture here (on what they claim, see note 22 in §5.2.3 above), but I think their arguments are not decisive: in my view, there still is a chance that it does. This issue, though, affects nothing essential in the following.
48. See Lupoli and Jampol 2017, 1039 and Sloman et al. 2010, 268.
49. Dennett 2006, 221.
50. See Gendler 2010 on why the common view is correct: "contemplation of an imaginary particular may have cognitive and motivational effects different from those evoked by an abstract description of the same content" (116).
51. Liebersohn (2015a), at least, might say it is an aberration as Plato conceives of it. See note 38 in §5.3.2 above.
52. See §1.2.1.
53. Euthyphro's explicit complaint at 11b6–d2 is just that Socrates makes Euthyphro's good definitions of piety look bad, but the likelihood is that Euthyphro thinks Socrates plays tricks even in the part of the conversation that precedes the discussion of what piety is. The reason, indicated below, has to do with the kind of expertise that Socrates tests Euthyphro for.
54. Why is this clear? Among other reasons, when Socrates asks Euthyphro to say what the form (εἶδος, ἰδέα) of piety is, Euthyphro agrees that he can do it (6d–e). And e.g., this is after Socrates has spoken of becoming Euthyphro's pupil (as if Euthyphro can *teach* Socrates), whereupon Euthyphro has gone along with the idea and, in fact, immediately thereafter, has even said that he could outdo other people in argument (5a–c).
55. Maybe I should say "*nearly* all the important topics," in case there are some that Euthyphro thinks we understand through divination. However, Biernat (2018) seems right that, even if Euthyphro is a religious innovator, as some scholars have thought, he is still "primarily an interpreter of poetry, confident in the authority of the poets" (331), and simply reads them in a nontraditional way. On the disagreement about whether Euthyphro is an innovator, see the discussion and references in Biernat's essay and McPherran 2003, 4.
56. Rather than, perhaps, "What is an example of a type of pious action?" See Nehamas 1975, 291ff.
57. Beversluis (2000, 178) makes a similar point. Unlike me, he adds that Socrates' tests are illegitimate because all Euthyphro *claims* he can do is find passages in the Homeric text that say authoritatively whether certain actions are pious: he never claims he can address the larger exegetical issue of what piety itself is according to the text, much less the philosophical issue of what piety is *simpliciter*. One problem with Beversluis' view is that, again, Euthyphro implies that he can show what piety is: even if Socrates *tricks* him into addressing more than the smaller exegetical issue, Euthyphro does take the bait (see note 54 above). Moreover, one generally needs to have thought through the larger exegetical issue in order to have expertise on the smaller one, and in order to deal responsibly with the larger exegetical issue, one generally needs some handle on

the philosophical issue, at least if one wants to say that everything the text means is true, as Euthyphro evidently does. The reason is that one needs to make sure that, together, one's interpretations of various passages yield an interpretation of the whole text that *lets* it mean something true. Part of doing this is figuring out what view about the nature of piety one has implicitly ascribed to the text in interpreting various passages; that is why one needs to think through the larger exegetical issue. Another task is to assess whether that view about piety is true; that is why one needs a handle on the philosophical issue. On how unthoughtful Euthyphro is even about the religious tradition he claims to speak for, see Eckert 2019.

58. E.g., at 10a–c, where he offers a string of analogies, ostensibly to clarify his famous question of whether the pious is pious because the gods love it or the gods love it because it is pious. Teloh (1986, 36) thinks the sole purpose of the analogies is to confuse Euthyphro. Weiss (1986, 443) is somewhat similar. For alternative readings, see Ebrey 2017 and Cohen 1971. At the least, Socrates could pause once Euthyphro expresses confusion at 10a4 ("I don't know what you mean, Socrates"); before offering his analogies, Socrates could explain the following in simple terms: things have traits (e.g., stone is solid and is hard to break); sometimes a thing has one of its traits on account of having another trait, but not vice versa (e.g., stone is hard to break on account of the fact that it is solid, but not solid on account of the fact that it is hard to break); pious actions have at least two traits—viz., they are pious and are loved by the gods—and Socrates' question is whether pious actions have one of those two traits on account of having the other and, if so, *which* of the two they have on account of having the other.
59. I draw this thought from Talisse 2003, 169. In consulting the *exēgētai*, Euthyphro's father "was following what was, as far as we can tell, normal practice," as Rosivach (2017, 236) puts it.
60. See §1.2.1.
61. I suggest also that Socrates does well to stick to exchanging arguments rather than confronting directly the personal issues that Euthyphro has. Socrates *could* point out to Euthyphro his issues with his father, e.g., but it is unlikely that Euthyphro would admit them right away, even to himself. He first has to see that his *ostensive* reasons for his behavior fail. I make a similar point below.
62. For part of the reason one does, see note 57 in §5.4.1 above.
63. The illocutionary force of what one says is, basically, what one intends to convey by it. The perlocutionary force is the effect(s) of saying it. Suppose, e.g., that the host at a lecture says over the loudspeaker to a noisy crowd: "If you'll have a seat, we'll get started." The illocutionary force of her statement (or, what it is supposed to convey) is that the lecture is about to begin and that it thus is time to be seated and silent. She means for the perlocutionary force of her statement to be that everyone believes the lecture is about to start, and as a result they sit down and stop talking.
64. In light of §5.3.6 above, one might ask whether Socrates could hold their attention if he clarified by means of lively images or myths, e.g. The answer is that he might, but that the sorts of points he makes with Euthyphro, and *needs* to make, don't admit of presentation through images or myths; or, at least, there is nothing extra an image or myth could do to elucidate them or make them compelling. Take, e.g., the famous question of whether the pious is pious because the gods love it or the gods love it because it is pious. An image or myth would not illuminate that question more than a simple explanation could (e.g., the sort of explanation pictured in note 58 in

§5.4.1 above). Images of pious actions or divine love would not help, e.g., and in fact, they might confuse the issue, because of how abstract it is. It is abstract enough that we miss it if we focus on particular actions or the like.

65. See 4e9–5a2 with §1.2.1 above. And on the idea that Euthyphro is self-deceived, see esp. Nehamas 1998, 39–41, 43–44, which contains other references. The way Euthyphro reasons may be additional evidence of self-deception, as Adler and Vasiliou (2008) can seem to suggest.
66. See §1.2.1 above.
67. Solely, or mainly. See note 55 in §5.4.1 above.
68. I paraphrase Reeve (2013, 3–4) and quote the same bits from Burkert (1985, 317, 321) that he quotes. Cf. Kindt 2012, 21 and Mikalson 2010, 16ff.
69. For discussion and references, see O'Connor and Weatherall 2019.

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Epilogue

Plato is fascinating, and that, even alone, perhaps, is enough to make reading him worthwhile. But it is all the better if he is useful, too—useful in the sense that the time we spend with him can teach us about more than just him. In this book, I have explained a way I think it can, a way that, if I am right, is significant and promising. It is significant because the health of a democracy depends on how thoughtful and discerning its citizens are, and the quality of people's thinking affects their individual welfare, too. It matters whether they engage in self-examination, in my sense of the term. No less important, it matters whether students in schools have intrinsic motivation to learn. Yet the question of how to draw people into self-examination is difficult and is not reducible to the everyday question of, say, how teachers in schools can interest students in course material. The latter question, which is itself difficult, of course, is a problem for pedagogy, narrowly conceived. The former question is a problem for psychagogy, in part since taking up self-examination requires a fundamental change of heart.

We who read Plato could address that question by studying his Socrates. We could start by gathering ideas about what protreptic strategies he might have, in the way I described in Chapter 2. And then we could evaluate those strategies and, when appropriate, analyze how to improve on them, in the way I explained in Chapter 1. Thereby we could refine our ideas about protreptic and craft a robust theory of it. Doing this sort of work would be a way of genuinely studying Plato, and it would be appropriate in Plato studies, for example, and in teaching Plato, as I argued in Chapter 3. It also would be at least as valuable as what Plato scholars already do, as I argued in Chapter 4. And it could be fruitful, for reasons I illustrated in Chapter 5.

Refining our ideas about protreptic and crafting a theory of it might seem like small steps, especially if we think protreptic must happen only in Plato's dialogues or in the modern classroom. But there is no sense in limiting our imagination that way—not when thoughtlessness is as pervasive as people often say. Protreptic, like all education, might take place not only between teachers and students in schools, but also between

parents and children, or friends or strangers, at home or at work, in pubs or book clubs, or in synagogues, mosques, or churches.[1] Plus, small changes can have real effects, if the conventional wisdom is true. And creating a more thoughtful culture is important enough that even small steps toward it are worth the effort.

As idealistic as that sort of sentiment can sound, I think it may resonate with many of Plato's readers. As much as they value what he wrote, they care, too, about a world beyond texts, just as Plato himself clearly did. This, in fact, is what draws many of them to him in the first place. A main attraction of his writings is how much they have to do with virtue and how devoted Socrates is to promoting it. In his own way, Socrates himself is idealistic. He tries to make the world better, by improving other people. The project I have proposed in this book would be a means of equipping ourselves for the same task.

I will add here at the end that it would also be a means of improving ourselves. Supposing self-examination is as important as I have said, each of us needs an account of how we are living our life and why we are living it that way. So if we have dedicated it, in part, to self-examination, we need an account of what self-examination is. And part of having one is naming the differences between self-examination and mere imitations of it. There are a range of ways it is only mimicked rather than actually practiced, and Plato depicts many of them in the characters he creates. Euthyphro, for example, purports to live an examined life, yet he wants to give reasons for his choices just by citing Homer. Crito offers Socrates arguments, but only to persuade him rather than to find the truth. Meanwhile, Meno and Thrasymachus are after only power and prestige. There are parallels in real life even nowadays, and in that sense and others Plato's depiction is incisive. But it may not be accurate at every turn, and investigating what it gets right and what it does not could help us see more fully what the counterfeits are, so that we are better able to tell them apart from the real thing and, in turn, better able to achieve it. That is something else we could gain.

Note

1. On protreptic in churches, see Marshall 2019.

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